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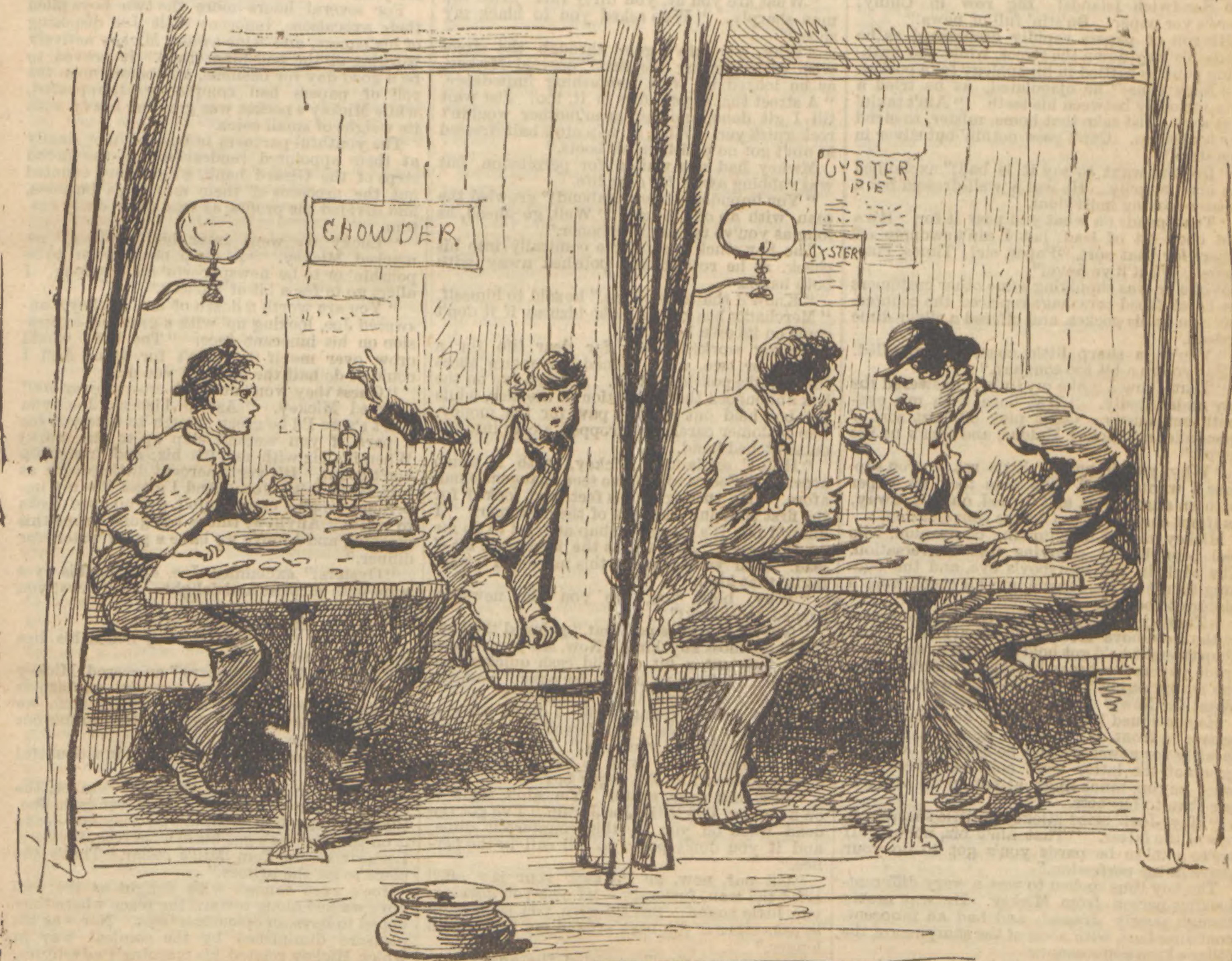
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No. 262.

THE YOUNG SLEUTHS; or, ROLICKING MIKE'S HOT TRAIL.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "BOB ROCKETT, THE BANK RUNNER," "BOB ROCKETT, THE BOY DODGER," "WILL WILDFIRE," "DARK PAUL," ETC., ETC.



MICKEY HELD UP HIS HAND IN WARNING, WHILE HE APPLIED HIS SHARP EAR TO A SLIGHT OPENING IN THE BOARDS.

The Young Sleuths;

OR,

Rollicking Mike's Hot Trail.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "DICK DASHAWAY," "THE TWO BLOODS," "WILD WILL," "BOB ROCKETT," "WILL WILD FIRE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

PAPERS AND SHOE POLISH.

"YERE'S yer Mornin' Post! Yere's yer Ledger, News, Item! Bloody murder in California! Nobody killed, but a good many 'spected to die! Roll up! Rattle up! Yere's yer paper! Have one, mister? It's jist b'ilin' over with news this mornin'."

The boy who was making the air musical with his yells was a half-grown urchin dressed in a ragged suit of clothes which had been made for a man, and which hung like empty sacks upon his slender limbs. On his head was crushed a shapeless cap, through whose well ventilated top tufts of brick-colored hair rose like plumes. His face was anything but handsome, but it was overflowing with cunning and boyish wit. Young as he was, he had evidently been well sharpened against the rough grindstone of the world, and was quite able to make his way, without help, through the thorny paths of life.

Under his arm was a huge roll of newspapers, of which he was rapidly disposing, as he howled his way along down the densest squares of Chestnut street.

"What'll you have, mister? Times, News, Mornin' Post? Got 'em all. High old time on the Sandwich Islands! Big row in Chiny! Yere's yer paper! Bu'stin' full of news!"

His roll of papers rapidly diminished as he made his way down the street, while the gathering pennies rattled in his apology for a pocket.

"Nary time!" he ejaculated, as he tried a coin viciously between his teeth. "Ain't takin' that sort. Jist take that home, mister, to mend yer lead pipes. Can't pass nothin' but silver in this shop."

"Do you want to say it is bad?" exclaimed the man, angrily. He was a well-dressed but a sinister-looking individual.

"That 'pends on what you pass it for. It's a fust chop bit of lead; but I ain't swoppin' off papers for that sort.—Paper, sir? Times, Post, News? What'll ye have?"

While he was supplying some other customers the harsh-faced personage replaced the counterfeit coin in his pocket, and offered a silver dime instead.

"You're a sharp little coon," he growled. "But you're a bit too tonguey."

"That's how I make my livin'," answered the boy undauntedly. "Was born with my eye-teeth cut, mister. Can't play off that sort o' spendulies on Mickey Malone, and ther's no use tryin'."

"Why, you impudent little rat, do you suppose I wanted to?" The man took his paper with an angry jerk, and turned quickly away, as if not caring to keep up the conversation.

Mickey nudged an admiring companion, who had been highly enjoying this conversation. The wink in the newsboy's eye, and the cunning thrust of his tongue into his cheek were a picture to behold.

"That's jist as thin as they spreads the butter at the Newsboys' Home," he remarked. "That chap thought he'd got hold of a green 'un, who'd trade papers for brass buttons. Didn't I take the starch out of 'im neat?—This way, mister! Want the News? Yere's yer paper."

He continued his route until he reached the square in front of the State House, a favorite locality for newsboys and bootblacks. Quite a group of the latter were collected there, who were paying much more attention to skylarking than to business.

"Hey, Joe!" cried Mickey, a little sharply, to one of the latter. "That ain't biz, nohow. If we're goin' to be pards you's got to do your share in the perfession."

The boy thus spoken to was a very different-looking person from Mickey. He was neatly though poorly dressed, and had an innocent, confiding face, with none of the sharpness of the other's keen countenance.

"I ain't done so bad," he said, in apology. "And a fellow can't be always standing like a post, whistling for a job."

"Ye ain't got no bizness enterprise, Joe. I's o'n told you that. You take the papers and give me the box. Bet you high I stir up some trade."

The transfer was quickly made, and Joe walked away, proclaiming his wares in a musical voice, while Mickey rolled his eyes sharply around, on the lookout for a job.

"Black 'em, mister? Black 'em? Give ye a prime old shine. Turn the wust cow-hide inter lookin'-glasses. Only got to look in yer boot toe to comb out yer mustache. Yere ye are! Double action blackin'! Fast colors! Now's yer time!"

At this moment a countryman came along, whose boots looked as if he had lately been walking in a plowed field. There was a general rush for him, in which Mickey was foremost.

"What you pushin' me for, Bill Prime? I'll bu'st yer nob if you don't look out sharp!" he angrily exclaimed. "This way, mister. Them fellers is got the old style blackin'. The same kind as Noah used. Yere's the lookin'-glass article. Last invention. Patent applied for. Step up till I polish you off."

"What's the plunder?" asked the countryman.

"It's ten cents, for a wholesale job," answered Mickey, with a queer look at the monstrous boots of his customer.

"You git out!" was the angry reply. "Here, boy, I'll give you five cents for a shine," and he set his heavy foot on Bill Prime's box.

"All serene," rejoined Mickey. "I don't take no contracts to shine a whole side of leather for five cents. Ain't goin' to be nobody's bankrupt, nary time.—This way, sir! Shine 'em up!"

A passer-by had paused, and Mickey waited for no further invitation. In a moment he had the man's shoe on his box, and was on his knees before him.

"What are you at, you dirty rat?" cried the man sharply. "Who asked you to black my shoes?"

"Why, yer ain't goin' through the street with underpinning like that?" queried Mickey, as he looked up with unblushing impudence. "A street that's got ladies in it, too? Jist wait till I git done, and yer gran'mother wouldn't reckernize yer. Why, a chap ain't half-dressed as ain't got no polish on his boots."

Mickey had not waited for permission, but was rubbing away for dear life.

"You impudent little vagabond!" growled the man, with an odd laugh. "Well, go ahead, as long as you've taken me prisoner."

The boy stuck his tongue comically into his cheek, as he rubbed and polished away with both hands.

"Know'd that'd fetch 'im," he said to himself. "Merchants has got to make bizness, if it don't come on its own hook."

Mickey worked away for dear life for a minute or two, until he had the man's shoes shining like polished silver. A sharp rap on the box announced the completion of the task, while the boy held out a dirty paw for the money. The customer carelessly dropped a coin into the outstretched hand.

"Hello!" exclaimed Mickey, with a sharp accent. "Seems to me I've seen that gentleman afore." He sprung to his feet, and looked for the first time into the face of the customer. "I know'd it! It's the same chap as tried to do me on the paper. And this is the identical bit o' lead. Told ye once afore this mornin' I wasn't takin' that kind."

"Why, blast you, are you the newsboy turned bootblack?"

"Got more trades nor that," grinned the boy. "Kin do 'most anything. Now, see yere, if you don't fork out a bit o' solid cash quicker nor lightnin', I'll have ye tuk up fer passin' counterfeits, and I ain't lyin' about it neither."

"Vamose, you young devil. I didn't ask you to blacken my boots. You forced it on me, and you can whistle for your pay."

He walked away with a swaggering gait, closely followed by the angry boy.

"Best fork over, mister. Yer ain't tryin' it on no baby, like little Joe Joram. I've got the dead wood on you in this counterfeit dime, and if you don't pony up I'll call in the police."

"Git out, now, or I'll kick your jaw off!" cried the man, furiously. "I owe you nothing, you little bound. But I'll give you something to remember if you bark around my heels much longer."

"I want my pay!" persisted the angry boy. "He's a thief and a cheat," he explained to the curious people, who had stopped to hear this

altercation. "He's got a shine of me, and paid me with this. Jist look at it, and then take a squint at that coon." He held up the coin for inspection.

The infuriated man turned and made a quick stroke at his tormentor. Mickey ducked, but the blow caught him on the hand, and knocked the counterfeit coin into the mud of the gutter.

The angry fellow ran forward to follow up his blow with a kick. Several others started forward at the same time, with the purpose of protecting the lad from his reckless assailant.

But Mickey was quite able to take care of himself, as he soon proved. For he darted like a cat past the uplifted leg of the brutal individual, and in a moment had sunk a set of teeth, as sharp as those of a rat, into the villain's calf. The latter yelled with pain, while Mickey shot rapidly beyond his reach.

"I got yer money!" he cried, exultingly. "There's yer change! I guess we're quits!"

Snatching up his box the boy twisted away through the crowd, sending back a defiant peal of laughter, which was echoed by some of the bystanders. Evidently they thought the customer served right.

The latter gave vent to a peal of curses, and stood for a moment as if in hesitation whether to pursue. But a glance showed him that pursuit would be useless, and he started on with a parting oath, in which he vowed to get even with the boy.

"Guess you won't, mister man!" exclaimed Mickey, with his fingers at his nose. "Jist try it on, and I bet you a cow I git even with you fust. You woke up the wrong coon when you tried it on Rollicking Mickey Malone, now I tell you. —Shine 'em! Shine 'em! Yere's yer prime blackin'. Fust chop, double X, slap-up polish! Have a shine, sir? Have a shine?" And with his box slung over his shoulder, the boy swaggered down the street, on a sharp lookout for jobs.

For several hours more the two boys plied their avocations, innocent little Joe disposing of his papers, and wide-awake Mickey actively working up the polishing trade. It proved to be a good day for business, and before noon the roll of papers had completely disappeared, while Mickey's pocket was growing heavy with its weight of small coins.

The youthful partners in business met finally at their appointed rendezvous, on the broad steps of the Girard bank, where they counted out the proceeds of their morning's business, and divided the profits, as was their daily custom.

"Lucky we went inter biz together," remarked Mickey. "A chap don't want to be polishin' or to be newspaperin' all day long. I allers go in for a bit of variety."

"You are worth a dozen of me, Mickey," answered Joe, looking up with a grateful expression on his innocent face. "The boys would crow over me if it weren't for you. And I couldn't do half the business you do."

"Guess they won't do much crowin' over me," laughed Mickey. "As fer bizness, Joe, you don't s'pose I'd be green enough to take you for a pard, if you weren't slap up to the mark! When it's biz with me, it's biz; and friendship don't count. It's yer innercept little profile as takes with folks, Joe. And I guess it's my imperdent tongue, cause I ain't got no good looks to waste. Anyhow, things has gone prime this mornin', and I move we have a go of 'ysters for dinner."

"Oysters!" exclaimed Joe, opening his eyes wide with surprise and delight. "Oh laws! you don't say so?"

"Do you like 'em?" asked Mickey.

"You bet I do!" and the boy licked his lips in joyous anticipation.

"Then we'll have 'ysters," answered Mickey decidedly. "We've been carryin' on bizness for jist a month to-day, and it's 'bout time we was havin' a div'dend. Guess I'll take mine out in a fry."

"I like 'em stewed," said Joe, in a doubtful tone.

"Bless yer eyes, you kin have 'em on the half shell, for all I keer! Pocket yer cash, Joe. Blamed if the boy wouldn't go way and leave it on the step, he's got his eyes so full of 'ysters. Let's strike for Tom Mill's cellar. That's the place to git the primes."

Joe's eyes danced with delight as the two boys walked along toward the place where they hoped to have an epicurean feast. Nor was his pleasure diminished by the comical way in which Mickey related his morning's adventure, and how he got even with the sharp who had twice tried him with a counterfeit coin.

CHAPTER II.

A "GO" OF OYSTERS.

THE youthful partners made their way slowly along Third street, chatting in a lively tone, though Mickey did the greater part of the talking and Joe of the listening.

"Whereabouts is that oyster saloon?" asked Joe, hungrily. "Ain't we a long time getting to it?"

"Jist listen to the little rascal! Why, I b'lieve an 'yester's as big as a watermelon in your eyes, Joe Joram. Only wait till you's had my 'perience! When you git 'vited out to dinner with the mayor, and sich big nobs, like I's been, ye'll be gittin' sick of sich luxuries."

"Now you're lying again, Mickey. And I don't see no use in that."

"That's the way with you Sunday-schoolers. Yer never kin take a joke. I didn't 'spain jist how it was I was 'vited out."

"And I don't want to know," broke in Joe, very decidedly.

Mickey laughed. He had got into a bad habit of lying by way of a joke, but that was one point on which he and his partner could not agree.

"Ther's no use wastin' fun on you," he remarked. "Yer a good deal too fine spun. Guess we'd best let it slide. Tom Mill's cellar's jist ahead here, and—"

He stopped suddenly, caught his companion's arm, and forced him into the opening of an alley near which they stood.

"Keep shady!" explained Mickey, in a stage whisper. "Ther's fun afloat. Don't ye do nothin' to spile it."

"What's up?" sputtered Joe.

"Hold yer jaw!" and Mickey pressed his hand on his companion's mouth. "Cute's the word. Mind I tell you that?"

A moment afterward two gentlemen passed the boys' biding-place. Mickey fixed his little eyes upon them with a fox-like glance, and then slapped his knee with satisfaction.

"Got 'em spotted, sure as shootin'. Come ahead, Joe! We'll see who's the sharp 'un."

He pushed out to the pavement, and set himself in pursuit of the two men, followed by Joe, who was full of wonder at this unexpected movement. Deep in the heart of the innocent lad was a suspicion that this was some trick to cheat him out of his oysters. He never could put full confidence in Mickey.

"What's up?" he asked, querulously. "You're going away from the oyster saloon."

"'Ysters be fiddled!" exclaimed Mickey, contemptuously. "'Ysters arter bizness, that's my motto! Tell you what, Joe, that's the chap as tried to do me with the scaly dime."

"You don't say so?"

"It's the identical chap," insisted Mickey. "He swore he was goin' to git even with me, but I bet I git even with him first. I know the feller that's with him like a book."

"Who is he?"

"He ain't a Sunday-school teacher, you kin bet on that," answered Mickey. "Never you mind. Ther's some things tain't best to speak about in the streets. You kin dive in somewhere and git yer 'ysters if you want, but I'm goin' to foller them coons."

"Then I'm going with you," asserted Joe.

"All correck! There they streak up Market. Kep shady now."

Without a thought of this pursuit the two men continued their walk out Market street, conversing earnestly as they proceeded.

"I'm hungry as a fox," said one, as they reached the corner of Fifth street. "Let's drop in here at Tim's oyster cave, and try his Cove plants."

"I'm agreeable," replied the other. "We can get a private box there which will do to settle the points of that job as well as anywhere."

They turned down Fifth street and soon entered an oyster cellar which opened upon that street. It was a neatly fitted up saloon, with tables in front, and a row of curtained booths at the rear, for such customers as desired privacy.

The two men entered one of these stalls, after giving their order.

But they had not quite disappeared ere a pair of blinking eyes, and a cunning young face, peered at them down the cellar steps. It was the countenance of Mickey Malone.

No sooner had the two men vanished behind the curtains than the youthful spy boldly entered the saloon, more timidly followed by his partner.

Mickey hitched up his very loose fitting suit, set his cap more firmly on his red head, and walked with a swaggering gait to the bar.

"'Ysters fer two," he ordered. "And lively! We're bizness folks, and ain't got no time to spare."

The attendant looked at him over the bar with a humorous expression on his face. He evidently thought he had got hold of a character.

"Haven't you been shaving off your mustache since I saw you last?" he asked, in a very grave tone.

The boy lifted his hand to his upper lip, with a well assumed expression of surprise.

"Sure's you live somebody's done that while I was asleep!" he ejaculated. "Ther' allers was a lot o' fellers jealous of that mustache."

The man laughed.

"You're a wide-awake young coon," he remarked. "How'll you have them?"

"I'll take a fry," announced Mickey. "And primes, mind you! Don't try to play off none o' yer cullens on this chap. I've been there afore."

"I want a stew," said Joe, modestly.

"All right, young gentlemen. Take a seat and we'll serve you out in a jiffy. Got your pockets well lined to-day, eh?"

"You bet!" and Mickey rattled his money in proof.

They had but a few minutes to wait, ere the fry and stew were served, piping hot.

"Take a table, young gentlemen," said the attendant, with the same air of deep respect to Mickey's invisible mustache.

"A table?" exclaimed Mickey, with deep contempt. "What sort o' chaps do you take us for, hey? We ain't that kind, now I tell you; and we're goin' for a private box, or nothin'."

"A private box?" laughed the good-natured attendant. "All right, my lord! Excuse me for not recognizing you sooner. Slide ahead then. Shall I send a waiter, with the provender?"

"Oh no, we ain't a bit sassy," answered the boy, with a lofty air. "We kin carry our own grub. Don't want no waiters to count my mouthfuls."

The boys picked up their dishes, and retired to the stall adjoining that occupied by the two men. The attendant followed them, with a humorous glance.

"That's a shrewd little rascal," he said to himself. "There's no fear but he will make his way in the world."

Some new customers entering diverted his attention from the boys, who had now disappeared behind their curtain.

Mickey laid his hand cautiously on Joe's arm.

"Mum's the word," he whispered. "Don't make as much stir as a mouse."

The dishes were deposited noiselessly on the table, and the elder boy stealthily seated himself on the side adjoining the stall occupied by the men. They could plainly hear the murmur of a cautious conversation which was going on beyond the partition.

Mickey held up his hand in warning, while he applied his sharp ear to a slight opening in the boards. The men had apparently let their voices fall, in consequence of the conversation of the boys at the bar. But hearing no sound in the adjoining stall, and naturally concluding that no two boys could eat oysters in silence, they took it for granted that the lads had occupied some more distant stall. They continued their talk, in consequence, with less caution.

It was impossible to keep Joe from his oysters. You might as well have tried to keep a miser from a gold mine. The little fellow had an overflowing appetite, and oysters were to him a luxury fit for the gods. But he managed to eat in silence, and to make up in joyful looks for the words he was obliged to suppress.

A look of knowing triumph came upon Mickey's expressive countenance. He had caught some words from beyond the partition.

"I'll have that box or split!" came to his ears, accompanied with an oath.

"Hush! You are too loud."

For some minutes their voices were inaudible. Then some low utterances came distinctly to the acute hearing of the spy.

"On the ground at eleven to-night. It's going to be dark and rainy. And the fandango in front of the house will take everybody from the rear."

"But about the dog?"

"Leave him to Tim. The dog knows him, and he ca' settle the brute's hash."

Again the voices sunk out of hearing. It was growing decidedly interesting. The quick-witted gamin shrewdly guessed that a burglary was in contemplation, and was burningly eager to hear more.

It seemed, however, as if he was to be dis-

pointed. The men's voices were now reduced almost to a whisper. In fact, he could have heard a whisper better than this confusing murmur of sound.

A burglary, at eleven to-night, at a house where some sort of party was going on! The object of the burglars a box! So much he had gathered. But this was a very indefinite piece of information.

Now he heard the men shuffling their feet, preparatory to rising. The boy despaired of hearing anything more definite. Fortunately at the last moment, a name came to his ears:

"I've sworn to be even with John Barton, and I will. I owe him more—"

"Hush!" came from the other, and the voices again subsided.

The next moment the men noisily left the box, talking loudly on indifferent subjects.

Mickey glanced over at Joe, in whose appearance there was something very odd. The boy had arrested his spoon half-way to his mouth, while a look of astonished inquiry marked his intelligent features. Something very striking seemed to have arrested his attention.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Mickey.

"Did you hear that name? Didn't those men say something about John Barton?"

"Yes," was the cautious answer. "And I'd give something to know who he is, for there's deviltry afloat, sure."

"I know," answered Joe.

"You do? Hush!"

He parted the curtains slightly and looked out.

The men were paying for their oysters. The boy waited until they had done so, and until he had seen them on the stairs leading to the street, ere he spoke again.

"Now you kin slide on."

"Aren't you going to follow them?"

"Foller 'em! And leave this fry that I's got to pay for? You don't suppose I'm an idiot, do ye!"

Mickey plunged into the mysteries of his fry with the more zest from his previous enforced caution.

"Who is John Barton?" he asked, between his mouthfuls.

"Why, haven't I ever told you? It was him my dad used to work for. He's got the nicest place away out over the Schuylkill. And he has done ever so much for us since my dad died."

"You know where the place is?"

"It's queer if I don't."

"There's a savage dog!"

"Yes; and a wall around it."

"I'll bet a blackin'-box and a roll of papers I've got 'em spotted!" ejaculated Mickey, as he continued to pay particular attention to his provender.

"Why, what's up? Anything about Mr. Barton?"

"Burglary!"—Mickey repeated this word in a deep, guttural tone that almost set the younger boy's hair on end. "There's goin' to be a bu'stin'-open time. Eleven o'clock to-night. They're goin' to bu'st inter Mr. Barton's house and carry off a box of di'monds or somethin' sich like."

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Joe, starting up. "Rob Mr. Barton, that's been so good to us! What shall we ever do, Mickey?"

"Hold yer whist! I'm cogitating," answered Mickey, curtly.

Any one else would have said that he was devouring. But perhaps Mickey was able to think and eat at once. He finally laid down his knife and fork with a sigh of satisfaction, crowded into his mouth the last cracker on the plate, and then looked over to Joe.

"What ail's ye, boy? You ain't finished yer 'ysters," he remarked.

"I ate all I could," answered Joe. "You spoiled my appetite. What is to be done, Mickey?"

The latter swallowed his cracker with a gulp, stood up, and looked down upon Joe with an air of infinite superiority.

"You've got to dig over to Mr. Barton's and post him 'bout this bizness. But mind you don't tell nobody but him. Tain't best for it to git out in the kitchen."

"And what will you do?"

"I'll have an interview with the police," answered Mickey, loftily.

Joe looked up at his companion as a lap-dog might look at a Newfoundland, with an infinite sense of his superiority.

"Your a cute one, Mickey," he declared, with deep admiration.

"Why, I do think I've got my eye-teeth cut," answered the elder boy, with a look of comical

pride. "When you's seen as much of the world as I have, you'll know a thing or two yourself. Come, let's git."

CHAPTER III.

GOOD CARDS BUT BAD PLAY.

IT was past two o'clock, and the mansion of John Barton lay four or five miles away from where the boys now were. In pursuance of Mickey's plan Joe prepared to set out for the half rural district in which was situated the mansion in question.

"And jist keep yer wits about ye," the elder boy cautioned. "Don't sell the trick to nobody 'cept Mr. Barton hisself. 'Cause why, he mought want to keep it mum, and not let it git loose in the kitchen. If they says as how he can't be seen, jist you say that you want ter see him on wery pertik'ler bizness. That allers fetches 'em."

"But suppose it don't?" suggested Joe.

"Ther's no s'posing about it. You's got to stand straight up, and cock yer hat a little o' one side—this way," and Mickey illustrated by giving his hat a ferocious tilt. "And be sure you speak kinder solemn like. 'On wery pertik'ler bizness.' Kin ye do that?" Mickey's voice seemed drawn from his boots.

"On very particular business," repeated Joe, with a slight quaver, as if the big words frightened him.

"Oh lawsee, no! Ye don't git down half deep enough. Better practice it goin' out there, till ye git it solemn like."

"And what am I to say to Mr. Barton?" asked Joe.

"Tell him to keep his eye skinned for burglars. They're arter a box of diamonds, or some sich plunder. They're goin' to pizen the dog, and bu'st in, while the fandango's goin' on front. And eleven o'clock sharp, P. M., is the hour. Don't ye forgit that."

"I won't," Joe earnestly answered.

"You kin tell him, likewise, not to trouble hisself 'bout the perlice. Your bizness pard, Mickey Malone, Esq., is a-goin' to interview them coves, and put 'em on the track."

"Ain't youafeird, Mickey?" asked Joe, in a doubtful tone.

"Meafeard? What of?"

"Of the police."

Mickey laughed contemptuously.

"Ever heered tell of a scarecrow, Joe?" he asked. "That's a bunch of old clothes, planted on a stick, to skeer the crows out of a corn-field. But sometimes ther' comes along an old coon of a crow, that's got his wisdom teeth cut. What d'ye s'pose he does? He jist gives a comical wink at the scarecrow, and dives in for corn. That's how it is. Them boys as isafeared of the perlice is like them young crows that'safeared of a pile of old rags on a stick.—Now you git, Joe. And mind yer eye, cause it ain't no baby work."

Joe set out at this intimation, though he could not help looking back with admiring eyes at his companion. Mickey had just given his dilapidated hat a tilt to the other side, hitched up his loose clothes, and started away whistling as if there was not a care left in the world. Little he cared for the police.

We must follow the youthful member of the firm of Malone and Joram, on the important mission with which he had been intrusted. There is no doubt but that Mickey will take care of himself, but his partner needs looking after.

Joe's first impulse was to make his way home. He did not like to undertake such an enterprise without informing and consulting with his mother. But the humble domicile of the Jorams lay a considerable distance down-town, and with the journey before him it was not quite agreeable to go several miles out of his way.

"I'll be home in time for supper, anyhow," he thought, "so it don't matter."

It did matter though, considerably, as he was destined to discover. If he had followed his first impulse, and consulted his mother, he might have saved himself a host of troubles, into which he was now plunging headlong. But it is hard to go against the fates.

The boy walked cheerily over the Chestnut street bridge, and out into the district of West Philadelphia, feeling deeply the importance of his mission. He looked at the people whom he met on the way, and wondered if any of them dreamed of the errand on which he was going. They did not seem to be aware of his existence, yet he felt sure there must be some signs of his purpose in his face.

Now and then a recollection of Mickey's ad-

monition came to him, and he repeated in sepulchral tones the important words he was to use, trying to catch the deep roll with which his tutor had brought out the phrase, "werry pertiklar bizness." But Joe's treble tones made sad work of it, and he despaired of attaining the proper depth of solemnity.

He would have been wiser to take a street car for his long journey, but six cents fare was as big as the full moon in the lad's eyes, and even the thought of such extravagance never came to him. An oyster dinner had been sufficient outlay of profits for one day.

It was nearly half-past four o'clock when he reached the vicinity of Mr. Barton's house. It stood alone in the midst of a grass-grown level, though there were built up streets not far distant. The house was a large stone mansion, with wings and outhouses, so that it covered considerable space. Connected with it was quite a large lawn and garden plot, around which extended a brick wall, of some seven or eight feet in height. It looked like the home of wealth, while the abundant growth of vines and flowers in the garden spoke of refinement as well as wealth.

Joe made his way very timidly to the front door of the mansion. Though well aware of the locality of the house he had never been there before, since he was a mere infant. His father had been gardener for Mr. Barton, but had died while he was quite young, and since then his mother had lived in the city.

He had often seen Mr. Barton himself, but was quite unknown to the servants of the household, and his extravagant sense of the importance of his mission made him tremble with apprehension as he timidly pulled the bell.

The first peal was answered by a tall, important-looking footman, who looked down on the boy with the supercilious surprise that the Kentucky giant might display toward Tom Thumb.

Joe felt his courage oozing out of his finger-ends, as this strait-laced individual glared stonily down upon him.

"Well, hop-o'-my-thumb, what are you haf-ter?" was the aristocratic query.

"Is Mr. Barton in?" faltered the boy.

"Mr. Barton hain't in, and won't be 'ome till height o'clock this hevening." The words came out as if ground out from a talking machine.

"But I must see him," persisted Joe. "I've got to see him on—on very particular business." The important phrase was out, but Mickey would have been disgusted with his pupil if he had heard him.

"Height o'clock this hevening," repeated the automaton. "Tell hit to me, little chap, and h'ill tell hit to Mr. Barton when'e comes 'ome."

Joe grew still more overawed by the importance of this great dignitary. But he did not forget Mickey's positive instructions, and answered:

"I am to tell it to nobody but Mr. Barton. It is very important, and the servants mustn't know it."

This was spoken in sublime unconsciousness of the possibility that this aristocratic dignitary might be a servant. It was answered with a sniff of contemptuous anger.

"Come back when 'e's 'ome then. And don't you be 'angin' haround 'ere, or h'ill 'ave you ducked in the 'orse-pond. Haway with you now, little himperdence."

The door was angrily slammed in Joe's face, and he left alone and baffled on the outside.

The boy could not help a sensation of anger at the way he had been treated. Timid as he was, and awed as he had been by the importance of the dignified footman, he could not but feel that he had been served shabbily. But there was no redress. There stood the closed door, and there the bell pull, which he dared not touch again. There was but one satisfaction left for him. This was to put his fingers disdainfully to his nose and to call out in a very low tone, for fear he might be overheard, "You're a Henglish hog, that's what you are!"

Eight o'clock! Away vanished the vision of supper, and there came in its place a fear of the fright of his mother when he failed to come home at the usual hour. But it would never do to return to the city until he had seen Mr. Barton.

There were nearly four hours to kill, and Joe wandered off into the surrounding fields. It was not often that he got a chance for a stroll in the country, and the trees, the green grass, even the rank weeds, were beautiful to his unaccustomed eyes. On and on he walked, following the course of a Prattling stream that seemed to coax him onward with its song. There were birds here, too, birds with a strain

very different from the twitter of the city sparrows. And yonder was a clump of woodland, with rustling dry leaves under foot and waving green leaves overhead.

Joe grew rather glad than otherwise that Mr. Barton had not been home. He could see him after eight o'clock, and meanwhile there was all this to enjoy. The boy had a tinge of poetry in his soul, and there was poetry in all around him, even in the tall plant with purple flowers, which he would have been weary loth to call a weed.

And then there was the sunset. It was no much of a sunset, to be sure. It had been cloudy all day, and the clouds were gathering more thickly now. Only a narrow rift, tinged with red and yellow, told where the sun had gone down. But it was so pleasant to watch it in the summer air, lying on the soft grass of a sloping hillside.

Nature, indeed, threw such a charm over the boy's senses that a soothing sensation gradually crept over him. Dim shadows covered the landscape and closed in his vision. Ere he knew what it meant he found himself asleep and dreaming.

What dreams Joe had on that grassy hillside we shall not attempt to tell. No doubt the solemn croak of the frogs in a neighboring pond had something to do with them. At length patriarchal frog, with a wonderful base voice joined in the chorus so vigorously that Joe awoke with a start. It was some minutes ere he could make out where he was. Thick darkness enveloped him—a darkness such as he had never experienced in the city. And as he lay some cold drops pattered into his face. It was raining.

He sprung quickly up and looked around him. To his left all was darkness. Off to his right the sky had a red glare—the reflection of the lights of the city. Nearly in front, at some distance, a vivid gleam of light met his eyes. It looked like an illuminated house.

Toward these lights the boy walked. The thought came to him that it might be Mr. Barton's mansion, as a party was to be given there.

He had but a vague idea of what a party was but he associated it with lights and music.

Joe stumbled on through the darkness, wondering to himself how long he had slept, and half-afraid that it might be too late to warn Mr. Barton of the projected burglary.

He was not long in reaching the vicinity of the house, and gaining a point where the gleam of the gas lights made its progress more easy. It was Mr. Barton's house, that was evident now; and he was pushing forward with more confidence, when a hand fell on his shoulder, and an angry voice cried in his ear:

"I've a notion to shake ye right out of yer boots; hang me if I ain't, Joe Joram. Where's you been, anyhow?"

"Mickey!" exclaimed Joe, with an odd mixture of dread and hope.

"Where's you been, I say? I's been hundin' you for three good hours. I s'pose though, you's got Mr. Barton posted."

"No," answered Joe, with a sinking heart.

"No?—And it's half-past ten, if it's a minnit. And ther's a high old shindig goin' on inside. And it's goin' to rain like blazes. And—what do you mean anyhow?"

He grabbed Joe, and violently shook him in his excitement.

"He wasn't home," stammered Joe. "He was going to be out till eight o'clock. So I went out in the fields to wait. And—I guess must have got asleep."

"I guess you must!" growled Mickey.

"But isn't it all right? You was going to interview the police, you know."

Mickey, in his turn, grew somewhat confused.

"I weren't nobby enough, Joe," he admitted. "I didn't have no watch-chains, nor diamond ring. And my rig weren't the last Paris cut. Hang if they didn't git on ther ears, and wouldn't listen to me no more nor if it was a fly buzzin' to them. Guess maybe they thought it was a newsboy's sell."

"That's about the way I got served, too," said Joe, and proceeded to recite his experience with the footman.

The rain, which had been slowly descending during this conversation, now freshened. The two boys made their way toward the house, but there came a sudden fierce down-pour which made them run hastily to the shade of a neighboring tree for shelter. This tree stood near a corner of the wall, in a situation that was quite dark. The boys continued to talk, as they crouched against the trunk for shelter.

"I'll settle for the Englisher," remarked Mickey valiantly. "I bet you high I'll take

some of the starch out o' him. You push in for Mr. Barton, and tell him—”

“What will I tell him?” asked Joe.

“You know. There's to be a burglary at eleven o'clock. They're arter a box of somethin', diamonds maybe. If he's cute he kin nab 'em. They're tryin' it on cause the party's in the house, and everybody's front.”

“I'll do it,” protested Joe.

“Will you, you young devil?”

These words were spoken in a subdued, but savage tone, and at the same instant the boys were seized by two burly framed men, who sprung suddenly out from the deep shadows of the wall.

“Make a whimper, and we'll brain the pair of ye!” cried one of them savagely. “As long as you know so much about burglaries you'd best come along with us. We'll teach you a bit more. And, mind your eyes. If you speak as loud as a fly's hum we'll scatter your brains on the grass. Come along, now!”

They dragged the two dismayed boys back along the dark line of the wall. The prisoners made no effort to give the alarm. There was that in the tone of their captors which showed plainly that they meant what they said, and would be as good as their word.

CHAPTER IV.

A RAID IN THE DARK.

HERE was a decided and most unlucky change in the state of affairs. Wide awake as the boys imagined they had been they had not learned the useful lesson of holding their tongues in strange places. It is never safe to talk about secrets in the dark, as they had just discovered.

Their captors dragged them along the wall, heedless of the rain that continued to fall in torrents, until they had reached the corner most distant from the house. The youthful prisoners kept silent, as they had been so sternly commanded. They were both very sure that it was safest just now to obey orders.

At the point where they stopped a thick-leaved tree threw its boughs over the wall, making a sort of roof, which partly protected them from the rain. One of the men cautiously opened the slide of a dark-lantern, and let a ray of light fall upon the youthful captives.

“Douse the glim!” cried the other, hastily.

“It aren't safe.”

“Ay, ay!” was the reply, as the lantern was closed. “I only wanted a squint at these youngsters. Regular street rats they are, too.”

The other man grasped the two boys by their collars, and forced them to the ground.

“Now tell me the truth,” he harshly demanded. “I want to know all about this burglary talk. And if ye try to spin yarns to me, I'll split your skulls open. D'y'e hear?”

“Dunno as we's told you no lies yet,” answered Mickey, valiantly. “S'pose you wait till we kick afore you kick back.”

The boy had been doing a great deal of thinking during the past few minutes, and had made up his mind how to act. Defiance came more natural to him than policy.

“Hold your jaw, or I'll split it for you!” cried the burglar, harshly. “You answer me.” He addressed Joe. “How came you to know anything about a burglary?”

The younger boy had none of Mickey's defiant spirit. He trembled with fear as he commenced to timidly answer.

“We heard it talked about, Mickey and me,” he began. “We was going to get—”

“Stop yer clapper, you little fool!” cried Mickey, harshly. “If they want to know anything let 'em find it out for themselves.”

“I can't lie about it, Mickey,” Joe humbly protested.

“But you kin keep yer tongue in yer teeth, and ther's no lie in *that*,” answered Mickey. “Cause ye don't want to lie, that's no reason ye'r to answer every imperdent question. Why don't you ax him if his gran'mother kept a monkey?”

The angry burglar shifted his hand to Mickey's throat, and compressed it with a choking clasp.

“I'll teach you a lesson, you little viper!” he hissed. “Mind your cue, or I'll choke the life out of you, for a dirty-faced, slippery-tongued, young hound!”

“S'pose I is ugly, you needn't be throwin' it up to me. ‘Tain't my fault,” answered the unflinching boy. “Nobody axed me afore I was born what kind o' nose and eyes I'd like to have. I hadn't no more say about it than a dead cat has 'bout bein' skinned. If they'd only con-

sulted me I s'pose I'd 'a' come out a reg'lar little angel.”

The man's hand relaxed as a grim laugh came from his lips. Mickey had evidently gained a point with him.

“Knock the young puppies in the head, and be done with it,” advised the other savagely. “They're a bit too sharp.”

“No,” rejoined the other. “Maybe we can make better use of them. You know we talked of bringing Tim's boy. Where is he, anyhow? What keeps him?”

“Here he comes now.”

There was a slight scratching noise on the other side of the wall. Dark as it was, in a minute more a shadowy object revealed itself above the coping. Then came the thud of a heavy weight on the sodden ground, as if a man had sprung down.

“Hey, Tim!” said one of the others cautiously. “Is it you?”

“A bit of me,” was the reply.

“And the dog?”

“Done for I reckon. Lucky the brute knew me, or it wouldn't been so easy. I left him the meat, and I judge he's gobbed it down by now. If he swallows that he won't bark much after. —Hello, Jerry, what the blazes have you got there?”

“No names, you fool!” growled Jerry fiercely.

“Didn't you call my name not two minutes ago?” asked Tim.

“But your right name isn't Tim.”

“No more is yours Jerry.”

The burglars laughed as if they thought this a very good joke. But the laugh, though it may have deceived one of their prisoners, did not deceive the other. Mickey wasn't to be taken in with such chaff.

“That's too thin,” said the boy to himself. “It's a slip of the tongue, and ye can't play it off on this coon with a laugh. Jerry's the name. I'll go high on that.”

Meanwhile there was a hasty explanation to Tim of the circumstance of the capture, and of the strange fact that the boys knew about the burglary.

“There's an old brick pond back here,” suggested Tim. “Tie them up neck and heels, and toss them into it. Drowned boys tell no tales.”

This suggestion was made as coolly as if he had been giving an invitation to supper. Little Joe trembled in his boots at the cold-blooded proposition to murder them; but Mickey was made of sterner stuff.

“Try it on and you'll see,” he defiantly answered. “Ther's more knows 'bout this bizness than you've any notion of. If Joe and me don't turn up all square, ther'll be some other fingers in your wool. Ye didn't s'pose we was innocent babies, hey?”

“You lie, you rat!” answered Jerry, severely. “Hold your prate, blast you! If there's another whimper from your lips you'll get a settler over the left ear.”

“What's the look-out, Tim? Is the coast clear?” asked the other.

“As a whistle,” answered Tim.

“Then let's to work. Now's our time. We've had a glint at the house, and there's noise enough front to drown thunder at the back.”

“The rear rooms are empty,” replied Tim. “The doors are all fastened, though.”

“We'll find a way in,” was the confident answer. “Come ahead. And fetch those confounded boys. They know so much about burglars that another lesson might do them good.”

With a renewed assurance to the prisoners that a word, or noise of any kind on their part, would be paid by a fracture of their skulls, the burglars made their way to the spot in the wall from which Tim had descended.

Here a brace of fence rails had been laid in a slanting position, by whose aid the top of the wall was easily attained. Jerry lifted the two boys, whose collars he had continued to grasp, to his friends on top of the wall. In a minute more the whole party had reached the ground on the inner side.

The rain was falling less heavily now, but the darkness continued, unbroken by a ray of light from the house, which was brightly illuminated on its opposite side. A medley of sounds came to the ears of the burglars as they made their way stealthily forward. The ringing music of brass instruments, the sound of dancing feet and of laughing voices, were mingled with the softer sound of the rain-fall, that pattered on the roof and walls of the building.

The garden was thickly grown with bushes, through which narrow gravel walks wound toward the house.

“Give us a glim,” demanded Jerry, as he

stumbled in the darkness among the bushes. “We'll never make our way through this infernal thicket in the dark.”

In response the side of the dark lantern was partly opened, letting a narrow line of light fall on the path in front.

“Good. I've got the chart now. Push on, Tim. Won't do to waste time here.”

The path which the light had revealed to them quickly brought them to the rear of the house. Here matters were found as Tim had reported. All was dark and silent, while every door and shutter seemed fastened. Evidently the servants had secured the rear entrances, and were probably crowded around the doors of the dancing rooms, gaining an outside enjoyment of the fun.

The burglars consulted for a minute or two in low tones, while their youthful prisoner remained silent, not daring to speak. Even Mickey, reckless as he was, felt satisfied now that silence was golden. Their savage captors were not the men to trifle with.

“It's thundering lucky we've got the boys,” remarked Jerry. “There's nothing but that little window over the water tank, and only a boy can go through it. Drop one of the rats in, and let him slip the bolts of this door, and the game's our own.”

“Which one will we give the job to?” asked the third burglar.

“To the rabbit, not to the fox,” was the answer. “This little chap will do.” He laid his heavy hand on Joe's shoulder.

The trembling little fellow dropped to his knees on the wet ground.

“Oh don't send me! Don't send me!” he begged. “It's against Mr. Barton! Don't make me help rob him! Oh! I wouldn't do anything to hurt him for the world!”

His piteous appeal was answered by a hard blow from the open hand of the burglar, which stretched the boy prostrate on the ground. Then the ruffian caught him by the collar, and lifted him as if he had been a dead leaf.

“Will you shut up now? Or do you want another settler?” he demanded. “I'm going to put you through that window, and I expect you to open that door. Say whether you'll do it or not, before I mash your head into jelly.”

“Yes, yes!” whispered Joe. A new idea had come to him. If once inside the house he might give the alarm!

With this thought in his mind he yielded to the hand of the burglar, who pushed him through the narrow opening, hardly wide enough for the boy's slender frame. Before letting go of him, however, he destroyed the hope which had been working in the lad's busy brain.

“Do you feel that?” he asked, pressing a cold object against the boy's forehead. “Can you tell me what that is?”

“Is it a pistol?” asked Joe tremblingly.

“It's a six-shooter, boy. Now mind you, I'm going to drop you to the floor, but I'll keep my eye on you. I know what you're up to, you rat. You're working it in your head that you'll run and yell when you get inside. But you won't run far, for a bullet can run faster. If you try any trick I'll shoot you like I'd shoot a rabbit. Do you hear?”

“Yes,” faltered the frightened boy, who really supposed that his mind must have been in some way transparent to this shrewd villain.

“All right, then. Slide the bolts of the door. If you take a step anywhere else, or speak above a whisper, I'll kill you.”

His savage, grating tone made Joe's very bones shiver. Reaching his arm within the window as far as possible, he released the boy, who dropped to the floor with a light thud.

The lad crept hesitatingly to the door, still half inclined to dare all consequences and give the alarm. But a harsh growl from the burglar decided him.

“Mind your eye, now. I'm watching you. Be quick and quiet about it.”

The boy, in his nervous alarm, was not aware that he was quite out of sight of his foe. He felt his way in the darkness to the door, and with a sinking heart withdrew the bolt, upon which his hand had fallen. Lifting the latch he reluctantly opened the door.

A low exclamation, full of triumphant satisfaction, came from without. The door was pushed open, and Joe caught and lifted outside.

“A nice little fellow you are, to go selling your friends,” came in a mocking whisper. “Now, Jerry. You know the ground. Second floor, back. Third drawer from top. Quick, and don't fail, on your life.”

The speaker was the third burglar, whose name had not yet been given.

A growling response came from Jerry's lips. He disappeared into the house, closing the door behind him. Heavy built as he was, not the sound of a footfall came from him. He was evidently well trained in the art of burglary.

The other two waited silently and impatiently without. Plainly this was no ordinary effort at house-breaking. A particular object was desired by the burglars, and they had chosen their time very shrewdly for the carrying out of their scheme.

Several minutes had elapsed. There were no indications of an alarm. It appeared as if the robbery was going to be safely consummated. Joe crouched in trembling terror. As for Mickey—

"Look alive!" cried Tim, suddenly. "Where's that rascally boy?"

The other man glanced hastily around. Mickey had disappeared. He had taken the advantage of a moment's carelessness, and slipped away into the darkness. With a bitter oath the man started in pursuit.

But at this instant there was a new diversion. A deep, hollow bay broke the stillness of the night. It was the voice of the watch-dog.

"Blast the dog! he hasn't took the meat after all!" ejaculated Tim. "Why don't Jerry hurry? If he ain't here in a jiffy the job's all in the fire!"

As he spoke the door was hastily flung open, and Jerry sprung out.

"The job's done," he briefly said. "Now for cover!"

One quick leap took him into the darkness of the garden. Tim followed, while a whistle of recall from his lips gave the warning to the third burglar.

Little Joe hesitated for a moment, and then fearfully followed this rapid flight. At the same instant there broke out again the bay of the watch-dog, succeeded by the scudding of a heavy body through the bushes.

CHAPTER V.

AN ALARM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

INSIDE Mr. Barton's residence quite different events were taking place than those that had occurred outside. The house, as we have said, was a large one, and a considerable distance intervened between the scene of festivity in front and of darkness and crime in the rear.

Two large rooms, separated by a wide hall, occupied the front portion of the first floor. These, by the aid of folding-doors, were all thrown into one, and were filled just now with a gay and festive throng, full of the spirit of enjoyment.

Heavy chandeliers depended from the ceilings, throwing a flood of light over the richly furnished apartments. But tables, chairs and sofas had been pushed aside to make room for the dancers, who whirled in the bewildering mazes of the waltz over the broad floors. The musicians were seated in the wide hall, back of the passage between the doors, making the whole house vibrate with the ringing strains of their instruments, as a lively dancing tune gave animation to the feet and the hearts of the merry guests.

Ladies in flowing silks and satins; gentlemen in glistening broadcloth; young and happy faces; the gleam of joyful smiles; the merry sounds of youthful laughter; the murmur of gay chat; all were there, and "all went merry as a marriage bell."

No wonder the servants surveyed the scene with eager eyes from the shadowed depth of rooms beyond, and from the region of the hall back of the musicians, and left the remainder of the mansion to shift for itself.

Mr. Barton, a tall, solidly-framed man, with open and cheerful face and handsome features, walked from room to room, with a smile and a word for every one he met.

"How is it you are not dancing, Mr. Price?" he asked. "I should fancy that you, of us all, could not withstand that music."

"I have been," answered the youthful person addressed, with a sickly smile. "But there's so much dancing nowadays, you know. It is hard to keep up to the pace."

"Getting danced out, eh?" answered Mr. Barton, with a look of covert amusement. "That's early, for a brisk young blade like you."

"Perhaps it's the dreadful weather affects me," yawned the fop. "I'm so sensitive to changes. And it's raining unmercifully outside."

"Yes," and Mr. Barton shrugged his shoulders.

"It isn't the most agreeable night.—Well, Milton, boy, what is it?"

This was addressed to a slender, handsome youth, who stood by as if he wished to speak.

"Nothing much, uncle," he replied. "Only I thought I saw something queer in the garden. I was up in my room just now, and saw a sudden flash of light in the bushes. But it was gone when I got to the window, and I could see nothing more."

"A flash of lightning, I fancy," smiled Mr. Barton. "It's too wet for glow-worms to be abroad."

"No, sir, it wasn't lightning," persisted the boy; "or I don't think it was, at least. It didn't look like it."

"What else could it be, boy? It is no night for stragglers. And if there were any about I fancy that our watch-dog, Wolf, would have had a say in the matter before now."

"Yes, I guess he would," rejoined the lad, still a little doubtfully. "It's queer, though. I came right down to tell you."

"Suppose you run up again, Milton, and take another look out," suggested Mr. Barton, in a kindly tone, "you had best satisfy yourself.—The lad is a little nervous," he continued, as Milton started quickly away, "and boys are apt to magnify trifles."

"That is true," said the person addressed. "I could easily find you his match."

Meanwhile the lad ran quickly up-stairs to the third floor. Here he entered a room to the rear, and threw up the window, from which he took an earnest observation of the darkened scene below.

From his position nothing was visible. The burglars were hid by a projection of a lower roof, and only vague spaces of darker shadow indicated the bushy clumps of the garden.

Yet there was something that attracted his attention. A faint murmur, that sounded much like human voices, came to his ears. But it was so mingled with the patter of the rain and the sounds of festivity from the lower rooms, that nothing definite could be made out.

"Maybe it's only a fancy," he doubtfully said. "We can 'most always hear odd sounds if we listen for them. And Wolf wouldn't keep quiet if there were stragglers about. But, I wonder if the dog is loose. They may have left him chained up, and his kennel is away around front."

Full of this new idea he ran hastily down-stairs, determined to satisfy himself upon this point. Slipping through the line of dancers, he made his way to the porch in front, and thence to the side of the garden wall. The rain had considerably slackened, and was falling now in only a light drizzle.

Wolf, the old watch-dog of the house, whimpered uneasily as the lad approached his kennel. He had indeed been forgotten by the servants and left chained up. The keen senses of the old dog had not failed to trace something suspicious in the air. But he had been approached, not long before, by an old acquaintance, Tim, the burglar. This had quieted his doubts, and though he had declined to eat the poisoned meat left him, he had given no alarm.

Now, however, his canine suspicions were again aroused. New sounds and scents were abroad. Milton found him straining at his chain and eagerly sniffing the air.

"What is it, old fellow? What is it, Wolf?" asked the youth, as he patted the dog's shaggy head, and tried to loose the chain from his collar.

There came at this moment, from the garden to the right, a rushing sound, as if some one were forcing his way through the bushes. It was followed by the tones of a man's voice in a fierce oath.

Wolf lifted his long muzzle and emitted a bay that rung through house and garden. The next instant Milton succeeded in slipping the chain.

"Find them, Wolf! Find them, old chap!" he commanded.

The intelligent animal needed no second order. A quick leap forward, another loud bay from his powerful jaws, and he was off through the garden without heed to bush or vine.

It was an exciting moment for more than one. The burglars were dashing for the rear wall with their prize. Little Joe was irresolutely following them, hardly knowing what he did. Mickey, who had slyly escaped from his captors, was seeking to gain the front of the house and give the alarm, when the savage peal from the dog caused him to crouch down for concealment. Milton, full of excitement, ran hastily to the porch and broke into the front door of the house, exclaiming, in loud tones:

"There are robbers in the garden! I have just set Wolf loose, and he is after them! Come quick, uncle Barton; we may catch them!"

"Hold your tongue, boy!" Mr. Barton angrily exclaimed, running forward and grasping the boy's arm with a hard gripe. "You are too old to be scared by shadows."

But the mischief which he wished to avert was done. The dance broke up with a huddling together of the dancers, like a flock of frightened birds that crowd together for safety. The music ceased with a crash. The cries of frightened women, the loud tones of men, little screams and nervous exclamations, succeeded the gay scene of the moment before. The boy's startling announcement had fallen like a thunderbolt in their midst.

"Keep cool, ladies," exclaimed Mr. Barton, in a masterful voice. "It is nothing of importance. Milton is overly nervous. Go on with your dance. I will see what is the matter outside. The dog has scented a rabbit, I suppose."

His words were interrupted by something more startling yet. This was the sound of a pistol-shot, which rung sharply in from the garden. It was followed by a more savage bay from the dog.

"By Jupiter, there is something," exclaimed Mr. Barton, as he sprung hastily to the porch and disappeared in the darkness without.

Several of the guests followed him. But in the ball-rooms all was confusion. Many of the ladies were clinging to the gentlemen for protection. Others stood with white faces and trembling lips, looking nervously toward the door. And some of the men displayed as little self-control as the most nervous of the ladies.

"We shall all be killed! I know we shall!" exclaimed one of the frightened fair ones. "Oh, why did we come here? It is too dreadful for anything!"

"Keep cool, Mabel. I will protect you." Mr. Price's arm stole around the waist of the frightened beauty, while he attempted to throw an expression of ferocious courage into his face.

It cannot be said that Mr. Price was alone in his courageous movement. Others of the gentlemen displayed their courage in the same daring manner! And there was some reason to think that the ladies did not quite disapprove of being thus protected!

The servants had rushed back at the first alarm, and now, armed with lanterns and weapons of various kinds, sallied out to explore the grounds.

Meanwhile the burglars had made a straight dash for the wall. They did not hesitate now to open their lantern to guide their steps through the darkness.

"This way!" exclaimed Jerry. "Where's Mart?"

"He struck out for the runaway boy. But the whistle will fetch him."

"The boy's got away from you?"

"Yes."

"High chap you are! Curse that dog! I wish it was choked. Is this the wall?"

"Yes. And here comes Mart."

"Up, then, like a flash!"

The wall was lower on this side, and some gardener's tools lay against it at the point they had reached. A quick spring, and Jerry was seated astride the copings.

Tim quickly followed him.

As the first burglar leaped to the ground outside, tightly compressing the stolen box beneath his arm, the dog's fierce bark sounded perilously near. He was rending his way through the bushes to the left.

"Let him have it, Tim," exclaimed Mart. "Drop the hound if he shows himself."

He reached the wall as he spoke. Tim drew his pistol, and hastily fired at random into the bushes. His shot was answered by a savage bay, and the next instant the form of the dog broke into sight. Mart had caught the top of the wall, and was on the point of swinging himself up, when the fierce brute sprung at him.

There was another ineffectual pistol-shot, a cry of fear or pain from the man, a sound like the rending of cloth, and then Mart succeeded in gaining the coping, and rolled, rather than leaped, to the ground outside.

But Wolf had a good square foot of pantaloons stuff between his teeth, and the dismantled burglar felt a sudden and uncomfortable access of cold air to his person.

They had not got off quite scot-free.

In fact the burglars were just in time. Voices now sounded in the garden. The back doors of the house were thrown open and lights emerged, which rapidly spread to right and left.

"Here is one of them!" cried one of the

searchers. "Up, you little villain! There's no use hiding. I've got you sound!"

It was Mickey, who had crouched against an outhouse for fear of the dog. He attempted to explain something, but was silenced by his impudent captor.

"Hold your tongue, you young reprobate, or I'll knock you into the middle of next week! When we want any talk from you we'll tell you."

Mickey incontinently subsided.

Meanwhile Joe had continued his flight toward the wall. He reached there only to find himself confronted with the savage dog. It was perhaps well for the frightened little fellow that the brute had got his prize fragment of cloth entangled in his teeth. He sprung at the boy and knocked him down by his impetus, setting his foot on him as a cat does on a mouse. Joe expected nothing less than to be made a meal of, but luckily for him Wolf's teeth were not, just then, in working order.

"'Ere's one of 'em! 'Ere's one of 'em!" exclaimed a voice which the boy at once recognized. "'Ere's one of the howdacious rascals! Take 'im from the dog, before 'e heats 'im up!"

A group of angry faces surrounded Joe, as he wearily looked around, after his rescue from the dog. There was no sympathy in those countenances.

"Bring the little villain along," cried one of these. "He's beginning early. They've caught another of the same stripe back there. Look at his hangdog face."

He flashed the light of a lantern into Joe's badly scared countenance.

"Hi know 'im. Hi know 'im!" exclaimed the footman. "'E was 'ere this very afternoon, spying haround, and hasking himperdent questions. Hi knowed 'e was a burglar then."

"Bring him along. Let Mr. Barton see the young villains."

Joe and Mickey were dragged toward the house, in which alarm was still rampant. They were pushed into a room, and locked up together, with the footman for a guard, while the search of the grounds still continued.

CHAPTER VI. UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

THE room in which the two young prisoners found themselves was dark and chilly. Joe crouched down and shivered in his wet clothes. But Mickey was not of that sort. His active young brain was already busy with schemes to get out of the scrape into which they had fallen.

"What will they do with us, Mickey?" whispered Joe. "They can't hang us for this, can they?"

"Hang us, you little jack!" laughed the elder boy. "Mought poke us in jail, may be, for a while."

"I don't want to go to jail! What will mother think?" Joe was ready to cry.

"Now don't you go pipin' yer eye, and makin' a baby of yerself. I ain't a-goin' to no jail, you bet. If they come round yere pumpin' us, just you shet yer tater-trap. Let me do the talkin'."

"But what will Mr. Barton think when he sees me?"

"Don't keer what he thinks. Guess we didn't git inter this yere scrape a-purpose."

The guard at this moment opened the door, and peered into the dark room.

"Old your tongues, you howdacious ruffians!" he demanded. "You'll be 'ung for this, hand we won't 'ave no talk habout it."

"We'll talk till we're blind, and you kin dry up, for a bloody Englisher!" roared Mickey. "Git out now, 'fore I shy a pitcher at your head!"

The guard suddenly withdrew his caput, fearing that his ferocious prisoner might be as good as his word.

"Whoever 'eard 'of the like?" he declared, throwing up both hands in virtuous astonishment. "Was there never such a country, where the very babies, bin their cradles, is cutthroats? Why did I never leave hold Heng-land, for this blarsted Hamerica?"

"To keep yer dirty corporation out of the poor-house," roared Mickey through the key-hole. "I guess Hamerica could spare a few shiploads of sich aristocratic cusses as you."

What might have followed this contemptuous insult it is impossible to say. But at this moment other steps approached, and the door was flung open again. The flash of lights broke into the room, and several persons entered.

Joe crouched down with a more frightened aspect than ever, as he saw that Mr. Barton

was among the number. But Mickey faced them boldly.

"Well," exclaimed Mr. Barton harshly, as he critically surveyed Mickey's ill-fitting attire, and the bold assurance of his ill-favored face, "you are a promising looking candidate for the State prison, I must say. Quite a youthful bud of promise."

"Dunno as I'm the only one inside these yere walls," the boy sullenly replied, angry at the insinuation.

"Search him and take the pistol from him." Mr. Barton signed to two of his servants.

"He hasn't any, sir," they announced, after a search, to which Mickey quietly yielded.

"Then it must be the other. There were two shots. And there is nobody about but these boys. Examine the other."

Joe, who had been crouching low down, with his face concealed, was lifted rudely to his feet, and forced to stand upright.

"He has no pistol," was the announcement, after a hasty search.

"Then they must have thrown it away. I am sorry to see such mere boys as these attempting burglary, but I fear they must be made an example of. You are sure you found the kitchen door open, Thomas?"

"Yes, sir," answered one of the men. "And I had bolted it myself, "I'll affirm to that."

"I am very sorry," and the gentleman's eyes wore a softer expression as he observed Joe's evident fright. "Take down the boy's hands. Let me see his face."

The removed hands displayed a countenance very different from that of Mickey, a pallid, tearful face, whose eyes turned fearfully to right and left, like those of a rabbit that has been cornered.

Mr. Barton gave a start of pained surprise, as his eyes fell upon his face. He looked again, with a searching glance, into Joe's terrified countenance.

"Mercy on us!" he ejaculated. "Little Joe Joram, as I live! Good heavens, is it possible that he has begun a life of crime?"

"It wasn't me!" faltered Joe. "It wasn't me, indeed, sir! I never done nothing wrong, Mr. Barton, indeed I didn't! It was them—the men!"

"Who?" asked Mr. Barton. "There were no men."

"Hold your gab, Joe," cried Mickey, harshly. "Didn't I tell you I was going to be the active partner in this yere business. We ain't stole nothin', Mr. Barton. We only come yere for—"

"To try and steal, I suppose. Or how came that back door open?"

"Oh my!" exclaimed a lady's voice at the door. "Did any one ever see such bloodthirsty faces?"

"They look like young bandits!" cried another, with uplifted hands.

"Excuse me, ladies," remarked Mr. Barton, shortly and decisively. "They look like neither bandits nor murderers. I must request you to return to the ball-room, or this investigation cannot go on."

But a second glance satisfied him that the hall outside the room was filled with curious faces. The guests had learned what had taken place, and were crowding eagerly back, with very natural curiosity.

"Take the prisoners upstairs, Thomas," he ordered one of the servants. "Lock them up in the back corner room on the third floor. I will examine them further after a while."

Mickey had ceased his effort at an explanation when so sternly interrupted by his questioner. He stood with firmly compressed mouth, and a hard look upon his young face, during the subsequent conversation.

"Take them away," repeated Mr. Barton.

Grasped firmly by the arms, the lads were led between two files of unsympathetic faces, Mickey marching boldly upright, and returning look for look: Joe with downcast features, and a look of deep shame on his expressive countenance.

Exclamations of surprise and horror came from many of the observers. Only one voice spoke in a different tone.

"Poor little drowned rats, I don't believe they had anything to do with burglary. There's some mistake here."

Joe lifted his eyes and fixed them gratefully on the face of the speaker. It was the youth Milton who had spoken. His countenance was full of pitying sympathy.

A minute more, and they were out of the range of observant eyes. They were taken quickly upstairs and locked in the room indicated. Not content with locking them in, the

English footman was again set in guard over the room door.

The guests returned slowly to the ball-room, eagerly conversing over the incident. It was a feature of the entertainment on which no one had counted, and which added a remarkable zest to the enjoyment of the evening.

Two or three of the older gentlemen remained with Mr. Barton, in the room in which the boys had been examined.

"There is something mysterious about this affair," remarked one of them. "This is too bold an enterprise for such mere boys to take in hand. There is somethin' behind this which we have not yet discovered."

"I fancy so, myself," replied Mr. Barton. "I was too harsh with the boys. I thought to frighten them into a confession."

"Frighten!" rejoined another, with a dry laugh. "There's one of those boys, at least, you won't easy frighten. I never saw a sturdier young vagrant."

"But the other was scared half out of his wits."

"I know him," said Mr. Barton, slowly. "His father was an old servant of mine. I don't believe there is any bad in the boy. He has been led astray by his villainous comrade. However, as there has been no harm done, and nothing stolen, it may be best to merely scare the boys a little, and then let them go."

"Was that your object in talking to them so harshly?"

"Partly, I confess. And a night's imprisonment will do them good."

"Oh, uncle!" came a voice from without, in an excited tone.

"What now? What is wrong, Milton?" Mr. Barton strode hastily to the door.

"We were all mistaken. There has been a robbery committed after all."

"A robbery?"

"Yes. The secretary in your office is broken open, and the drawers pulled out. I do not know what has been taken, but I am sure something has been stolen!"

With a harsh exclamation Mr. Barton ran excitedly to the stairs. The others followed him, eager to learn the result. But before they reached the room in question he had already finished his investigation and returned to the door, his face red with anger.

"By Heaven, gentlemen, I have been robbed indeed! There has been a box of valuables taken from my secretary. Of great value in fact! And the thief knew where to look for it, for nothing else is disturbed."

"The boys—"

"Hang it, no! There have been older heads and bolder hands here. We must resume the search. The police must be notified at once. The true thieves cannot have got far away yet."

While a renewed excitement extended itself to the ball-room, servants were sent out in various directions, and the grounds, inside and outside the wall, were closely searched with lanterns.

One significant discovery was quickly made, the rent fragment of cloth of which Wolf had made a prize. The gravel walks of the garden showed no signs of footsteps, but in the rain-soften earth outside the wall marks of men's feet were plainly discernible. And mingled with them were smaller traces, evidently the footprints of boys.

Mr. Barton shook his head gravely.

"It is plain the boys have been with them," he said. "See, here is where they jumped down from the wall. And here go their steps outward. Three sets of them."

The rain had now ceased. The deeply-impressed footprints were easily followed. But they led toward a neighboring street in which their tracks would soon be lost.

While this new search was in progress the captives remained closely locked in their prison. It was a room in a corner of the building, looking down with a sheer descent of twenty feet to the ground, as Mickey soon satisfied himself.

"Tell ye what it is, Joe," he declared, turning curtly to his fellow-prisoner, "we're a pair o' monkeys in a box, we are. We's got ourselves in a high old scrape, and ther's no goin' back on that."

"Don't I know it?" answered Joe.

"See yere, boy. The rope ain't round yer neck yit, as I see. What's the use of gittin' yerself in sich a ridiculous skeer?"

"If Mr. Barton hadn't known me," returned Joe, in a trembling tone.

"We's got to git outer this. That's the whole long and short of it. I don't like that there

man for nothin'. He's jist the kind as won't b'lieve a word we say, if we swear to it till the sky turns green. It's a bad show, Joe; but if we don't want to go to Moya we's got to slide outer this consarn."

"How?" asked Joe, looking up more hopefully.

"How? Well, ther's a good many hows. One way's to jump out the winder. But I'm a little feared we'd fatch up too kinder suddent."

"We can't do that," declared Joe.

"Another how is—"

He was interrupted by the opening of the door, and the appearance of the full-moon countenance of their jailer, the footman.

"Silence hin there!" he exclaimed, authoritatively. "You howdacious young ruffians, hi'll slap your jaws hif you don't stop that clatter."

Mickey, whose back was turned to the speaker, winked knowingly to Joe.

"Wide awake now," he muttered. "I'll nab the Englisher."

But we must return once more to the searching party outside. By the aid of the lantern they traced the footsteps in the rain-sodden ground for a considerable distance. But not far off in this direction a street had been cut through. It was not built on as yet, but the roadway was paved, and it soon proved impossible to follow the robbers by their footsteps further in this direction.

Sending the servants onward to make inquiries, and to warn any policemen they might encounter, Mr. Barton and his friends returned to the house. They had been absent about half an hour.

"We had best examine the boys at once," he said. "We may gain some information necessary to use immediately."

But they had first to pass through a running fire of inquiries, which detained them some ten minutes more, ere they could make their way to the stairs.

"I hope none of you ladies will be alarmed," remarked Mr. Barton, cheerily. "Pray, do not let this spoil your enjoyment. Let the music strike up again."

The players promptly obeyed, and it was to the sound of musical strains that they ascended the stairs.

"What's become of that stupid, consequential fool of a Joseph, who was left on guard here?" exclaimed Mr. Barton, on seeing that the door of the prison room remained unguarded. "The jackass has strayed away somewhere."

He was interrupted by an extraordinary noise from within the room; a sort of inarticulate howl, followed by a furious pounding upon the door.

"Eh! what does this mean? Have the young vagrants gone mad?"

He unlocked and flung open the door as he spoke, expecting to see a pair of frantic boys.

But what was his surprise to find that the boys had disappeared, and in their stead he saw the person of their jailer, all his aristocratic dignity gone, his face red and swelled like a boiled beet, while short howls of rage and dismay came in puffs from his lips.

"To think has hi never come from hold Hengland for this!" he managed to ejaculate, in a sort of frantic roar.

CHAPTER VII.

A DASH FOR LIBERTY.

We must go back a step in our story to explain how this strange metamorphosis had occurred, a transformation scene in which two undignified boys were changed into a dignified man.

When we last looked in upon the youthful prisoners, Joseph, the footman, had just done the same, and Mickey had quietly advised his fellow captive to be wide awake, and he would nab the Englisher.

The next instant, to the surprise of the jailer, Mickey tumbled in a heap on the floor, and began rolling and howling in a most distressing manner.

"Oh Lawsee! Oh cricky! Oh jiminy!" he yelled, as he doubled himself up like an eel. "Oh, send for a doctor! I'm afire inside! I'm afire! afire! afire!"

This was given in gradually rising howls, which only the busy conversation and other noises below prevented from alarming the house.

Joe stood with staring eyes and upraised hands, not knowing what to make of this sudden attack. But Mickey, in the midst of his paroxysm, managed to roll over to him, and give him a sharp pinch on the leg.

"Look alive, you beggar," he warned in a low tone. "Stand ready to run!"

This was followed by another volley of appeals for aid.

"Oh! oh! oh! The doctor! The doctor! Afore I burn up to a cinder!"

The jailer would have been made of stone if he could have withstood this. He ran hastily into the room, on whose floor Mickey was twisting and writhing as if there was not a bone left in his body.

"What hails you?" he shouted. "Ang me if hi ever 'eared such a clatter! 'ave you got the toothache, er the hinfuenza?"

"It's my insides that's all a-turnin' outside!" cried Mickey, as he gave Joe's leg a sharp push toward the door. "Oh! I'm goin' to die! I'm goin' to die!"

The thick-brained footman was quite dumfounded by this occurrence. He threw up his hands in horror, and exclaimed:

"Don't you die 'ere! Hit's haginst the law to die 'ere!—Old there, boy! Where har' you goin'?" This was to Joe, who had made a start for the door.

"I am going for the doctor," replied Joe, with a happy thought.

"Come back 'ere! Come back, hi say!"

He started quickly to arrest his flying prisoner, but he was not destined to reach him. For with a sudden squirm Mickey managed to throw himself between his long legs, around which he twisted like a snake around a tree.

The natural consequence followed. Joseph was tripped up, and fell headlong to the floor, his prominent nose being the first point to touch bottom.

With a last volley of "Ohs" the shrewd little schemer disengaged himself, sprung to his feet as if impelled by a spring, and gave a disdainful kick to the prostrate body of his dupe.

"Take that, you bloody Henglisher; and don't come foolin' round Hamerican boys ag'in!"

With a laugh of contempt he leaped to the door, through which he vanished just as Joseph was scrambling, in a dazed fashion to his feet.

"Come back 'ere! Come back 'ere hinstantly, you howdacious—"

He was interrupted by the slamming of the door, and the turning of the key in the lock.

"What's the matter hinside there?" came in an impudent demand through the keyhole. "Got the toothache, or the hinfuenza, hey?"

The next moment the involuntary prisoner heard the boys retiring with a triumphant laugh, from the door. He ran furiously against it, but it resisted his efforts. The tables had been decidedly turned.

Utterly heedless of the cries of their prisoner, whose sound was muffled by the closed door, the boys hastened down-stairs. But the final flight of stairs opened out into the hall, in the full blaze of light, and in open view of the guests, who were moving about in an excited fashion.

"Won't do, Joe," warned Mickey. "That'd be jist a jump from the fryin'-pan inter the fire. We's got to investegate this yere shanty a bit."

"There's somebody coming up-stairs!" announced Joe, with sudden alarm.

Mickey caught him by the collar, and drew him quickly within a room, whose door stood open to their left.

"Whist's the word," he said. "Don't stir, no more nor a rabbit."

There was little danger of that. Joe was much too frightened to stir.

The step came steadily upward. Gazing slyly through the partly open door the boys recognized the face of Mr. Barton, who was accompanied by several others. They made their way to the foot of the next flight of stairs.

"If we ain't got to cut stick now ther's no fun," whispered Mickey. "It's gittin' blazin' hot. Won't ther' be a high old time when they find the sort of pig that's in their bag? Come, Joe, it's Cherry Hill prison if they nab us now."

He sprung out into the hall which ran back beside the stairs. Several rooms opened into it, but Mickey made his way rapidly to the rear, where a window opened outward.

"Are you going to jump?" asked Joe timidly.

"I ain't goin' to git cotched, if I have to turn a handspring outer the winder. And I don't b'lieve ther's no elevators 'bout these diggin's."

"This way," cried Joe gleefully. "Here's another stair."

"That's hunky. D'ye hear the row up-stairs? Lawsee! wouldn't I like to be there now, to see our rat walk out of the trap. But bizness won't permit." A hearty laugh broke from the

reckless boy. "Come, Joe. Tain't no time to be moonin' now. Slide's the word, and hey jolly diddle!"

Down the back stairway he went, taking scarce three steps to the whole flight. Joe followed no less rapidly. They now found themselves in a pitchy darkness. But after groping around for a minute a door was discovered, which opened easily, and let in a beam of light from the front of the house.

"Yere's a winder!" cried Mickey. "Mind yer eye, Joe. They're arter us. Dig out behind me, you little beggar."

There was indeed no time to be lost. Excited voices were heard up-stairs, and sounds as of rapidly descending steps. A light flashed down the stairway which they had just descended. Evidently pursuit was to be sharp and decisive.

Fortunately the shutters had been opened and the window raised during the recent search. Mickey went through it with the agility of a cat, in a quick leap that landed him in a bunch on the soft ground outside. Joe followed more carefully, letting himself down by his hands and dropping to the ground.

"Not that way," cried Mickey. "Here, by the porch. You don't hanker to run inter the dog's jaws, hey?"

"But they'll see us that way."

"Let 'em see! Who keers! Give Mickey Malone a fair start, and I bet a persimmon they don't nab him."

The rain had now ceased falling. They had reached the ground at the side of the house, not far from its front. There was sufficient light here to enable them to make their way easily.

Stealing quickly forward, in a second they had gained the outer corner of the wide porch, which fronted the mansion. A few steps more and they would be in full view of the guests, for a bright light illuminated the shrubbery and walks in this direction.

"Pelt out, Joe," cried Mickey.

"I'm afear'd," responded Joe, tremblingly.

At this instant a loud bark came from their left. Wolf had evidently caught the scent.

"There's the dog! Yell be eat up alive if you don't pelt out like sealin'-wax! Slide, d'ye hear?"

Jerking the scared boy, Mickey set out at full speed. Joe followed. There was no help for it now. The gate to the grounds lay but some twenty paces in front, and stood wide open. If they could but reach and close it behind them?

But they had not taken five steps ere they were discovered from the house and the alarm given.

"There they go! There they go! This way! This way! Stop thieves!"

Steps were heard rushing hastily from the rooms to the porch. The bay of the dog came nearer and nearer. The boys ran as they had never run before. There were no seconds to waste now.

They neared the open gate. A crushing sound in a bush just behind told of the approach of the dog. To the right was visible a slender, boyish form, running hastily forward, as if to intercept their escape through the gateway.

It was an instant of thrilling interest. But the boys had slightly the advantage in the race, and their speed was winged by fright. They reached the gate and darted through just in advance of their pursuer.

But instead of his springing through after them, as had seemed his purpose, he hastily closed the open gate, just in time to shut in the dog, who came bounding fiercely up. The youth caught him by the collar and jerked him sternly back.

"What did you do that for, Milton?" came an angry voice at his elbow. "Do you want them to escape?"

"I don't want the sorry little vagrants to be eaten up alive by this brute," the lad firmly replied. "Yonder they go. Catch them if you can. But Wolf shall not touch them."

The light from the house reached out for a considerable distance over the fields that lined the opposite side of the roadway. But to right and left, out of this line of light, the dense darkness of a moonless and stormy night reigned supreme.

In this direction the boys were flying with the speed of fear. The momentary diversion had given them a start, and they were a hundred paces ahead when the gate was flung open, and several pursuers darted out after them.

It was now a question who could run the fastest, boys brought up in all the wildness of street life, or men who seldom took a step faster than a walk.

Up the road and into the fields Mickey led the way, little Joe quickly following. Soon

The darkness swallowed them up, until they became but faint shadows to their pursuers. But now the latter fancied themselves to be gaining. The shadow ahead grew more distinct. It had certainly ceased moving. In a moment more they were close upon it, and—to their amazed eyes they saw it was nothing but a clump of bushes.

"This way!" was the cry. "They can't keep up that pace long! We'll soon run them down!"

"Where are they? We have lost sight of them," spoke another voice.

"Spread, then. Take in the whole field. They can't escape us."

The pursuers ran hastily onward, spreading out like a fan, to right and left. They, too, soon disappeared in the darkness, only their voices revealing their position.

Hardly had they done so ere a smaller shadow emerged from the shadow of the bush.

"We's done fer 'em, as sure as you live!" came a youthful voice. "Sold 'em as cheap as dishwater. Lawsee! wasn't it gay that bush was yere?"

"Bet it was!" answered Joe's voice.

"Strike this way, Joe. Cross the road ag'in. And back 'long the wall. They're flung, sure as shootin'."

Two faint shadows dashed across the road and gained the shelter of the wall, just as some new pursuers, bearing lanterns, made their appearance through the gate.

A half-hour afterward a weary and disappointed party slowly returned to the mansion, with only a story of failure to tell their eager questioning friends.

"How they escaped us I don't see. We didn't leave an inch of ground unsearched. But the young rascals had the darkness in their favor."

Among those who listened to these words, was the dazed, reddened, woe-be-gone face of Joseph the footman, hanging back on the very edge of the crowd as if too utterly ashamed of himself to show his face in honest company. Every ounce of dignity seemed to be washed out of his composition.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDER COVER.

A LIGHT tapping sound fell on the window of a house in a narrow street in the southern region of the city. It was a window on the second floor, in the rear of the house. The sound had continued for some time, when a childish form quickly raised itself from the bed that occupied the room, and cast a half-scared glance toward the window. The sound continued, and the child sprung out of bed to the floor, and fearfully approached the point whence came the startling noise.

The window was slightly raised, and the tones of a low voice now came through it:

"Don't be scared, Mollie. It's only me!"

With a hasty impulse the child rushed forward, threw up the sash, and gazed eagerly out.

"Oh, Joe, is it you?" she cried. "Where are you, Joe?"

"Don't make any noise," warned the voice. "Don't waken mother."

"Where are you, Joe? And do tell me where you have been? You don't know what a way we've been in about you."

She had now caught sight of a youthful figure and an upturned face. It was Joe Joram, who stood on the roof of a shed, from which he had been able to just reach the window.

"You can't climb in there. Wait, I'll run down and open the door."

"No, no, don't!" exclaimed Joe. "I mustn't stay. I've got to go away and hide. But I had to tell you and mother first."

"Got to hide! Oh, Joe! What, forever, have you been doing?"

"The cops are after us, Mollie. I ain't done nothing. But I've got to hide."

"Oh, Josie Joram! Just to think!"

"You'll bear lies about me, Mollie. But don't you believe them. I wouldn't do nothing wrong for nobody. But I'm afraid they'll take me to prison. Don't you believe them, Mollie. And tell mother I ain't done nothing wrong."

He was interrupted by an impatient voice from below:

"Bite off that taffy. It's gittin' on to daylight, and we's got to scoot."

"Who's that down there?" cried Mollie, in alarm, her pretty, childish face peering down toward the ground.

"It's only Mickey Malone. It's him and me that's in the scrape."

"It's all because you will keep going with that bad boy," declared Mollie.

"Maybe ther's wuss nor Mickey Malone," came from that youthful hero, in a tone of indignation. "I ain't learned Joe nothin' he didn't know, you bet on that. I'm goin' to slide, and if he don't want to be gobbled up by the cops he'd best foller."

"There. Good-by, Mollie. You tell mother; and don't believe no lies, for you know I wouldn't do nothing wrong."

He lifted himself from the shed by his two hands, kissed the pretty, beseeching lips that leaned imploringly from the window, and the next moment sprung from the shed to the ground.

"Good-by, Mollie. It'll be all right soon."

"What's that?" came in a quick, startled voice from behind. "Who are you talking to, Mollie?"

"Oh, mamma! It's Joe! He's been here! But he's gone again!"

"Joe!" The distressed mother hastily ran down-stairs, and flung open the back door of house. But she was too late. The boys had disappeared.

Where the two boys spent the remainder of that night we do not know. Mickey was well posted in the sleeping places of newsboys and bootblacks, and they managed somewhere to get their wet clothes dried and to snatch a morsel of sleep. It was a sleep, on Joe's side, well sprinkled with ugly dreams, but no log could have slumbered more soundly than his experienced companion.

About nine o'clock the next morning the youthful partners made their appearance in a very uninviting down-town locality, a dirty and narrow street occupied by crazy and well-soiled residences, the abodes of abject poverty, to all appearance.

"Now see yere, Joe," explained Mickey. "They don't know me from a bunch o' beets, but they's got you down fine. You's got to keep shady till it blows over. But I ain't a bit afeared on 'em."

"Oh, Mickey, hadn't you best hide, too? Maybe they'll know you."

"How's we goin' to live without work, hey? I's got to do double duty now, for I's got to pay board for both on us. You don't s'pose nobody's goin' to give you yer grub for nothin'? That kind don't grow 'round these yere diggin's."

"But how long will we have to hide?"

"See yere, Joe," Mickey's voice fell as he gazed cautiously around him. "I've got them burglars spotted. S'pose I don't know that Jerry? You bet I do, then! and I'm bound to find where he hangs out, too. Now I'll tell you what it is. We're down for stealin' that box of diamonds. How's we goin' to make the thing square? I'll tell you how. We've got to steal it back ag'in from the burglars! If we kin step up to Mr. Barton and say, 'Yere's yer box,' d'y'e spouse that won't make it all hunky? Why, Joe, they'll be makin' statoots of us next, and settin' 'em up in the Park."

Joe laughed gleefully at the extravagant fancy of his friend. Mickey's scheme did not appear to him as wild as it was in reality. It was very much as if he had proposed to go to a hornet's nest in search of honey.

"Yere we are, Joe. Now don't you git skeered. I s'pect old granny'll guv me Yankee Doodle."

He opened the door of one of the houses and went in with his bold swagger, followed more timidly by Joe.

The room in which they found themselves was a narrow apartment, well filled with battered furniture, and with a cook stove at its rear end, over which bent an old woman in a cap. She looked quickly around at the entrance of the boys, and revealed a wrinkled and soured face, with a strongly Irish cast of features. The look which she cast upon Mickey was not reassuring.

"So it's yerself, is it, ye spaldeen?" she harshly demanded, griping the poker as if ready to use it on the boy's back. "Faix, and it's a nate time to be showin' yur purty face, arter I've been worritin' my soul-case out about ye the blessed night long. An' it ain't much'd be stoppin' me from layin' the poker on your dirty skull."

"Bless you, granny, ther' ain't no use in yer worryin' 'bout me," answered Mickey, easily. "Ain't I often told ye that we merchants sometimes have all-night business?"

"Hold your jaw, you omadhoun, or it's me self will be givin' you bizness for all day, too. Isn't it as much as I can do to keep my ten fingers off your ugly hide, and you a-standin there

as if you jist want to aggravate me. And bringin' your low company wi' you, too, in a decent woman's house!"

Joe was ready to fly in affright before this termagant assault. But Mickey winked to him to keep still.

"Sure, granny, the City of Galway came in last night, with news from Londonderry. And they got out extrees, which we kept sellin' till we couldn't stand on our two feet. And we jist dropped down and went to sleep anywhere."

"News from Londonderry!" cried the old woman, with sparkling eyes. "My own old home, bless it! What is it, Mickey boy? Tell it till the old woman, you little rogue."

"Not a word 'll I tell to nobody, till I've had some breakfast," declares the unblushing boy. "I'm half starved, granny; and so is Joe. Ain't you got a sly bite, stuck away in a corner of the oven for us?"

"Tell me first about Londonderry."

"Not a word till we've had our grub."

The debate ended in a victory for Mickey. He had shrewdly guessed at the fact. The old woman had not forgotten her errant grandson, and soon a smoking platter was placed before the boys, that was much more appetizing in smell than in looks.

"Dive in, Joe!" warned Mickey, "and make time; for I'm hungry enough to make a dinner on dry bones."

The meal over he took the opportunity to advise the old lady of his intentions in regard to Joe.

"He's a poor orphan, granny; and his uncle's arter him, as has mints of money. So Joe's got to hide his mug till the s'arch is over."

"Sure an' he needn't be hidin' if his uncle's so rich. Maybe ye'll be after tellin' me what he'd want to be hidin' for."

"Now don't ax so many questions, or you'll have me lyin' next. Look at the boy's innocent face, granny; and his sweet blue eyes. What more do ye want?"

The old woman looked in Joe's face, and her kindly heart was at once taken by his pleading look.

"I'll pay his board, granny," announced Mickey. "I'm going to run both lines of business, if I bu'sts a blood-vessel. I ain't never goin' back on Joe."

Mickey set his hat well aslant upon his auburn hair, gave a hoist upward to his baggy pantaloons, and prepared to set off on his day's labors, after a parting injunction to Joe to keep shady, and make himself at home.

"Sure you're not goin' widout tellin' me the news from Londonderry?" cried the old woman in alarm. "And arter I've kept sich a breakfast warm for ye."

"It's old news, granny," laughed the graceless boy. "The English has took the town, and King Jamie's sojers is off full tilt for the Boyne water. Maybe ye've heered it afore."

"I've heered you before, you dirty spaldeen!" roared the old lady, as she ran furiously for the poker. "And I'll tache ye how to poke fun at yer old granny, who's a-working her fingernails off for ye, and no thanks for it."

But Mickey knew that trick too well. He was off out the door like a flash, while a triumphant laugh did not aid in softening the old lady's outbreak of temper.

"The omadhoun!" she cried. "And you're a-helpin' him in it!" She turned angrily upon Joe, who had shrunk into a corner of the room, in dread of the threatening weapon.

But the lad's soft eyes, which had in them the appealing look of a cornered rabbit, disarmed the angry dame, whose stormy outside concealed a tender heart. She flung the poker away, and caught him in her arms.

"Poor little orphan!" she cried, "as is flung out on the cold world. Sure and ye'll never want a bit or a sup while Biddy Malone's got a crust left in the cupboard."

We cannot follow all Mickey's movements for the day or two succeeding. He certainly did his duty in the line of business, acting alternately as newsVendor and bootblack, and with a very good run of luck.

"I told you, granny, I'd pay both our boards," he remarked, as he passed over the proceeds of his labors. "I'm a young hoss when I git started. But I'm afeard I'd guv out if I kept up that pace for many days at a stretch."

"You ain't been tracked, Mickey?" whispered Joe.

"Nary time. And I'm keepin' a sharp eye open fur sprouts. Can't jist hit on Jerry's caboose; but I'm a-workin' up to it."

Late the next afternoon, just as he was nearly at the end of his bundle of extras, he was

stopped by a customer, who demanded a *Telegraph*.

Mickey needed all his power of self-control to suppress a violent start, as he caught a glimpse of this man's face. His hand shook in an unwanted manner while he made change, and the customer might have seen a queer look in the boy's eyes if he had paid any attention to him. A smile of gratification came upon Mickey's face as he followed the man with a significant look.

"Knowed I'd spot him if I'd only wait," he declared. "If it ain't Jerry, the burglar, then a cat don't like milk. And he's buyin' papers to see if ther's anything 'bout t'other night's job. I'm a-goin' to foller that there coon to his caboose or split."

He was on Jerry's track ere the latter had gained twenty steps in advance. The few papers he had left he quickly bundled up and thrust into his pocket. It would not pay now to be detained by customers.

Quite unaware of pursuit, Jerry walked on, reading the paper as he went. The boy was not far behind, though on the opposite side of the street, and he saw the movement of gratification with which the burglar read an item in the paper.

"Somethin' 'bout the job, I bet," declared Mickey. "Perlice off the track, I s'pose, and all rosy. If he only knowed that Mickey Malone was on his track, maybe he wouldn't find things quite so rosy."

The pursuit was a long one, but the shrewd boy managed to avert suspicion of his purpose, though more than once Jerry cast a keen look around.

Finally he tracked him to a house in a respectable neighborhood in the lower part of the city.

"Treed!" cried Mickey, slapping his knee. "That's the fu'st step. Now for the second."

CHAPTER IX.

HOW DUTY AND PLEASURE WERE UNITED.

MEANWHILE Mr. Barton had not rested quite easily under his loss. Full accounts of the robbery had been published in all the daily papers, and the capture and escape of the boys carefully detailed. As to their connection with the robbery various opinions were expressed, but the majority looked upon them as shrewd young rascals and apprentices of the burglars.

Mr. Barton, out of respect for the widow, had kept back Joe's name, but his loss was a very serious one, and it was necessary for the fullest investigation to go on, no matter who suffered.

Mrs. Joram was in the greatest distress, when Mr. Barton called on her, in company with an officer of the police.

"Oh, sir, I can't believe it of my Joe! You don't know what a good boy he has always been! And you might kill him before he will tell a lie, or take any thing that isn't his own! There must be some terrible mistake!"

"He has been keeping bad company, Mrs. Joram," was the reply. "Where is he?"

"I would give anything to know. I am 'most distracted about him. He has not been home since that night; only—only he came to the window, in the middle of the night, and told Mollie that he had got to hide, but he hadn't done anything wrong."

"Ah!" broke in the police officer, much interested in this information. "Go on, Mrs. Joram. I should like to hear all about that."

The widow proceeded to give the details of Joe's nocturnal visit.

"If I had only been awake I would never have let him go," she declared. "But Mollie is a mere child, and didn't know what to do. The poor boy has got in trouble, and has been badly scared, but he would never do anything wroag, I know that."

"There, there, Mrs. Joram," broke in Mr. Barton's kindly voice. "No harm shall come to the boy. But I must find him. He knows something about this robbery and has got to tell it."

"What do you think of it?" he asked the officer, after they had left Mrs. Joram's house.

"I hardly know yet," replied the latter. "It is a story that has its two sides. You know what mothers are. Their geese are all white swans. Yet it looks well for the boy that he had so much feeling for his mother and sister."

"So it seems to me. The lad may have been led astray by bad company, and accompanied the burglars without hardly knowing what he was doing."

"You tell me you have met with a heavy

loss, Mr. Barton," said the officer. "Were the contents of the stolen box so very valuable?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Barton, in a distracted fashion.

"Jewelry or money? We must be on the lookout for these contents."

"It wasn't that," answered the gentleman. "There was money in the box. But I care not for that. It contains papers which are more important to me than a box full of money."

"Ha! That may be important to us also. What was the character of these papers?"

"They involve my claim to my estate. If they should be destroyed I might find it impossible to prove my ownership. There is another person who would have a stronger claim. Unfortunately the most important document is not recorded."

"That is certainly very careless," responded the officer, with a dubious shake of the head. "But the loss of these papers will be for the benefit of one party, you say. Is there only one?"

"Yes."

"Man or woman?"

"A man, and one who does not bear the best of records."

"Good. The mystery is opening. It is that man we want. Why, you have nailed the whole affair in a dozen words. Where is he to be found?"

"In England."

"Whew!" came in a whistling sound from the officer. "England is a good ways off. But then it is not many days' distant. He may be here now."

"No. I have a telegram from him only two days old."

The officer hesitated and seemed lost in reflection.

"He may be doing his work by an agent," was the next remark. "This man is in some way at the bottom of it. I am sure of that. Come with me to the office, Mr. Barton. I want the complete story about this person, and a full description of him and his associates as far as possible. We may hit on some useful clew."

"I doubt it," answered Mr. Barton, dubiously. "I have not seen him for years, and know nothing about his associates."

"If we could only nab those boys," mused the officer. "We must have them. I am satisfied they can put us on the track. This little Joe, you say, is a bootblack?"

"I believe that is his profession."

"And the other is an ill-dressed, dirty-faced, impudent young reprobate?"

"That fits him exactly."

"Very well. I will have the bootblacks worked up. It won't be hard to find out who this second boy is. He is evidently the ring-leader. Come to the office, Mr. Barton. I want all the particulars."

During the succeeding days the newspapers continued to give particulars about the burglary. But they were much of a pattern with those about other robberies. Now the police were on the track. Now they were off it. Now they had a certain clew. Now they hadn't. It was the old see-saw that follows half the robberies that take place. The police have the thing down fine in the beginning; but it gets so dreadfully fine in the end that nobody can see it.

It was one of these newspaper squibs which showed plainly that there was no trace of the robbers, that Jerry had read with so much satisfaction. Mickey, after tracing him to cover, seated himself complacently upon a fire-plug at the corner of the street, took the bunch of papers from his pocket, and carefully straightened them out.

"I ain't much of a reader," he soliloquized, "but I've a notion I kin make out that there Jerrymiah. Ther's somethin' favorable 'bout the house-crackin' job; for Mr. Jerry wouldn't smile like a locomotive head-light 'bout nothin'."

Mickey's education was not of the highest grade. It took a hard wrestle with the alphabet for him to get the meaning out of the paragraph in question, but at last he accomplished it.

"I wish Joe was here," he growled. "He'd slide over it like as if it was so much ice, but it's like so many ten-penny nails, with their p'ints upward, to me. But I think I've got the hang of it, if I did ha—skip some of the big words as these fellers sick in to show their larnin'."

The shrewd boy sat and cogitated wisely for some minutes.

"All the papers makes out as them two boys

is in the ring," he muttered. "But they ain't got the hang of who the boys is, so they kin blow ahead if they want."

"Got the Telegraph?" asked a person who was passing.

"Yere you are, mister. Fifth edition. Ali the news.—Guess I'd best sell out. Tain't business to take home yer stock in yer pocket."

Springing from his perch he commenced again to cry his wares.

"Telegraph! Bulletin! Star! Chronicle! Yere's all the news! B'ilin' hot! Yere's 'bout the Chinese in Californy!—Want a paper, mister? Got all 'bout the burglary in West Phila-delfy. The perlice on the track. Full descriptions of the boys as stole the swag. Have a paper? Telegraph! Star! Bulletin!"

The few papers which Mickey had left speedily went off his hands, as he continued to rattle out a record of news, real and imaginary. He took particular delight in giving details of the burglary, chuckling the while to himself how neatly he was throwing all suspicion from his own shoulders by this shrewd course.

"There, that settles it," he ejaculated as his last paper went off, and the last penny slid into his pocket. "Wonder if I'd best strike out fur grub, or keep an eye open for Jerry, the cracks man?—Hello! Yere's fun! Guess I'll lay low, and see what's in the wind."

This exclamation was called out by the appearance, at a distance, of a face and form which he at once recognized. It was the man who had given him the counterfeit coin, which had led to all the after events of this story. Here was another point of which he was not so sure, as he had failed to get a fair look at his face on the night of the robbery, but he was inclined to think that it was the ringleader of the burglars, the one they had called Mart.

Mickey slipped slyly into a deep doorway, which partly concealed him, while he kept his sharp eyes fastened on the form of the person in question.

The latter turned into the street in which stood the house that held Jerry. He had not the slightest thought that the ragamuffin whom he saw lurking in a doorway had any connection with himself.

Mickey followed him with his eyes. The boy had now slipped behind the corner of a building, beyond which only the upper part of his head protruded.

"I knew it! I knewed it!" he ejaculated, with a wild laugh. "He's stopped afore Jerry's caboose. And now he's spyan' round fur snacks. Bet he don't nail me!"

The young spy withdrew his head under cover, and did not venture to look out again until a couple of minutes had elapsed. He was just in time to catch a vanishing glimpse of the object of his quest, as the latter entered the open door of the house into which Jerry had already disappeared.

If anybody interested in the antics of boys had been at hand just then, they would have seen a very peculiar dance, and heard a very odd song, coming from a ragged reprobate, with clothes three sizes too big for him.

"Lawsee!" he shouted in glee. "Ain't the thing a-workin'? Now if t'other one, that they call Tim, 'd only put in, we'd have all the snakes in one bag. Don't I wish I was inside that shanty? I bet I'd find a keyhole as'd tell me somethin'."

He continued to dance and sing, with a glee which he could not contain. For full ten minutes this mood lasted, ere the boy became sobered down sufficiently for reasonable thought.

It was one thing to discover the haunts of the burglars. It was another thing to recover the stolen property, which Mickey fancied was necessary to clear himself of suspicion.

"If I was to put the cops on the track, they'd snatch me too. I know jist what they is. Tbat there box is got to be nailed."

Such were his reflections after his spell of glee had passed over. But there was a question of probabilities to be worked out in the shrewd young brain. The robbery had been performed for the sake of the box alone. But who was it knew so well the position of that box? Who had a special reason for wanting it? Not the common burglars; but this well-dressed person who was the leader in the job.

"Does anybody s'pose as how he's goin' to guv that there box to Jerry or Tim to freeze onto?" continued Mickey. "Not much. I'm mighty sure he ain't that kind of a hairpin. The box ain't in Jerry's caboose, and ther' ain't no use in me 'vestigatin' it. I've got to find out where t'other one hangs out, and then ther'll be some sense in workin'."

Just now, in fact, there were two prominent moughts in Mickey's corporation. The question of grub was troubling his stomach; that of spying the robbers was troubling his brain.

"If I could only slip into granny's fur five minutes and swaller a plateful of mixin's, wouldn't I feel hunky? But it's too far off, and I might spile the whole bisness by diggin' arter grub. Duty afore pleasure, folks say. I wonder if eatin' ain't a duty fur a hungry boy?"

Here was a question in philosophy not easily settled. Fortunately Mickey remembered that there was a cook shop around the corner, and that there was a heavy weight of pennies in his pocket. It might be possible to combine duty and pleasure.

This at least was a question very easily settled. In a moment he had slipped off his perch and was away around the corner. In very few minutes more he reappeared in the street with a huge hunk of gingerbread in one hand and a quarter of pie in the other, to which he was alternately paying devoted attention.

Short as was the period of his absence it had made an important change in the state of affairs. Just as he was on the point of turning into the street two men turned out of it. He recognized them at a glance. It was Mart and Jerry.

Mickey managed to cover his countenance to such an extent with pie and gingerbread that no mask could have concealed him better. He was not long in putting himself on the trail of the two men, though to all appearance he was only a lubberly boy intent on filling a very large sweet tooth.

It was duty and pleasure now in earnest. Mickey continued to gnaw industriously away at his provender, but he took good care not to lose sight of his game.

For half an hour the pursuit continued. The two men seemed to feel no suspicions of being followed, for they did not once look behind them. Mickey's provender had long disappeared ere they came to a halt. It was in front of a house of considerable pretensions, on one of the uptown avenues.

They looked keenly around before entering, but there was nothing that seemed suspicious. Only some rapidly walking men and a ragged boy crouched upon a doorstep, and apparently engaged in tying his shoe-string. Without further hesitation Mart opened the door of the residence and entered, closely followed by Jerry. Then the boy quickly finished his shoe-string operation, and rolled upon the step in a paroxysm of laughter.

"Done 'em ag'in!" he cried. "Done 'em the wust way! There's where the box is, you bet! And there's where I's goin' fur it!"

CHAPTER X.

TRACKED TO THEIR DEN.

The detective officers whom Mr. Barton had put on the trail of the burglars did not lose much time in going to work. In spite of the fact that a telegram only a few days old had been received from England, signed by Martin Stewart, the party under suspicion, they were not sure but that this was a trick, and that person really in America.

The job was too important to intrust to an agent, they argued, and the sending of the telegram could be easily managed.

This Martin Stewart was a cousin of Mr. Barton, and next heir to the property which that gentleman had inherited. Only a certain important document stood between him and the property. That document should have been recorded. But Mr. Barton was very careless in business matters, and he had utterly neglected this important affair. In consequence he was in serious trouble. If that paper should be destroyed Martin Stewart could safely lay claim to the property; and from what was known about him, he was not one to hesitate about stealing the document and claiming the estate.

Thus the matter stood. Suspicion naturally attached to this English cousin, and an exact description of him was given the police, with orders to keep a sharp lookout for any man answering that description.

Another matter of importance was the discovery and arrest of the two fugitive boys. They must be able to give some description of the burglars, and it might be coaxed or frightened out of them.

To discover who Joe Joram's companion was proved a matter of very little difficulty. All the newsboys were aware of the queer partnership existing between Joe and Mickey, and the haunts and habits of the latter were soon in possession of the police. There was no doubt but that he was the party needed. The de-

scription of him given by the boys was at once recognized by Mr. Barton.

Mickey had certainly not been as cunning as he fancied himself. He was so wrapped up in the pursuit of the robbers that he had thought very little of his own position, or he might have known that he was biding Joe in the very place where he would be sure to be looked for.

But a boy cannot be expected to have the wisdom of a man, and one idea was as much as our sharp young friend usually had room for at a time.

He had returned home after his adventures in trailing burglars, and taken a night's sound sleep in preparation for the next day's work.

"Ther's fun afoot, Joe," he announced the next morning, "and jist how it's to be managed I don't see, but I want you."

"Want me!" queried Joe.

"Jist so. We's burglars now, don't ye see? We's been learnt the trade. Now ain't it our duty to let these fellers see that we 'preciate what they l'arnt us! You bet it is. I'm goin' to take a scoot through this chap's house, Joe, arter that there box. And I want you along. 'Cause one feller moughtn't be enough."

"But won't the police snatch me?" questioned Joe, in a great flurry.

"I guess you and me kin be wide awake enough to fling them roosters. A cunnin' little rat like you, and an old blizzard like me. Jist wait a minute, Joe, and I'll disguise you."

We cannot say that Joe quite approved of Mickey's idea of a disguise, which consisted partly of ink and partly of dirt. Yet with the begrimed face which he now presented and his hat drawn down over his eyes his mother would hardly have recognized him.

"All you's got to do now is to take a roll in the gutter," declared Mickey. "Them clothes is altogether too clean fur a dirty little buffer, like you're to be."

To this proposal Joe positively objected. It was bad enough to have a dirty face. Mickey said nothing. But they had not gone far along the street ere he managed to adroitly trip his unsuspecting companion into a very unsightly gutter.

"Lawsee, Joe!" cried Mickey, with great concern. "What's you tumblin' over my foot for? Didn't know you was so awkward. Let me help you up."

Help him up he did; but he first gave him a roll in the loud smelling mud; and his efforts to brush the dirt from his clothes only succeeded in spreading it from head to foot.

"Guess it'll come off when it's dry," declared Mickey. "Anyhow it was a lucky tumble. Nobody'd know you now for clean little Josie Joram. But, lawsee! sich an awkward buffer as you are!"

Joe cast a look of suspicion upon his companion, but said nothing. He felt that Mickey was master of the situation.

It was lucky for the boys that they left the house when they did. They had not got ten squares away ere a brace of officers approached the house, with intent to take them into custody. One of those stationed himself so as to prevent escape by the rear. The other rapped loudly at the front door. It was not long ere it was opened by old Mrs. Malone, who started on seeing the blue coat of the policeman.

"What's the like o' yez want in here?" she shrewishly demanded. "There's a lashin' o' folks lives 'bout this house; but they're all honest people. There's little call for yez 'bout here, at all, at ah."

"Are you Mrs. Malone?"

"Sure, and it ain't that boy you're arter?" cried the old lady in sudden alarm. "Och, and ye don't mane to say as he's been doin' somethin' he oughtn't! I allers told him as he'd come to the gallows, the spaldeen!"

"I want them both, Mrs. Malone," declared the officer, as he pushed rudely past the old lady, who blocked up the doorway. "Where are they?"

"Take 'em both, then. Sure and I'm doin' nothin' to hinder ye." There was a cunning glitter in her eye as she watched the movements of the officer.

"Is this your room?"

"Faix an' it is, then. It's the only room I've got in the wide world, ohone!"

"But where are the boys?"

"Why didn't ye ax that a bit ago: afore ye pushed yer dirty nose in to smell 'em out for yourself? Breakin' intil an old woman's house, widout warrant, ye ugly-faced peeler! Go ahead now, and do yer own findin'! And don't be sayin' much to me, or maybe ye'll be after feelin' the length of my ten nails!"

The presumptuous officer had certainly got

himself into a hornet's nest, and stirred up the hornets. He did not think it advisable, at first, to enter into a conversation with Mrs. Malone. The sample of her eloquence he had just received was quite satisfactory. He did not hanker after any more of it.

He continued the search throughout the house. It was occupied by several families, yet some of these might be giving shelter to the fugitives. A close investigation, however, convinced him that they were not there, and he retired somewhat discomfited.

"You must excuse me, Mrs. Malone," he apologized. "It's not me. It is the law you know."

"An' do you mane to say as you're the representative of the law? All I's got to say, thin, is that it's a scrawny old law that has sich representatives as the likes of ye. It ought to be repealed, by Act o' Parliament."

"Hold your tongue, you impudent old terma-gant!" cried the policeman, in a rage. "I'll have your boys, for your impertinence, if I have to stand on guard for them for the next ten days."

As Mrs. Malone retired from the battle a smile of triumph lit up her withered features. The anger of her antagonist was manna to her soul. It showed her that she had touched him to the quick.

The officer was as good as his word. He and his companion stationed themselves so as to command every approach to the house. It was a trap set for the two boys on their return.

But we must follow these young sleuths, on the somewhat doubtful and dangerous task which they had set themselves. To commit burglary on burglars is a mode of turning the tables not often practiced. It might be easier to get into the house, as it would not probably be strictly guarded. But to get out of the house might be the problem. It is not hard for the chicken to get into the fox's den; but the getting out is the difficulty.

Mickey was wise enough, in making his way up-town, to give a wide berth to their usual place of business. It might not be safe for Joe to be recognized by his ordinary companions. He was in no hurry, either. Midday was not the best hour for burglarious operations.

It was not far from noon when they reached the locality to which the burglars had been tracked the day before. It was, as we have said, a respectable street. The houses were three stories in height, with wide fronts, and with a neatness and cleanliness of aspect remarkably different from the locality which the boys had recently left.

"That's the shanty, Joe. That's the hole as our fox puts up in. We's got to dig in there, somehow. Only things looks kinder lively round yere now fur burglarism. Mebbe we'll have to wait fur night time."

"Do you think they are at home?" asked Joe, a little fearfully.

"How's I to know that? You don't s'pose as I've got eyes that kin bore through a brick wall, and tell what's goin' on inside?"

"But if they were there, and were to catch us!" queried Joe. "Won't they just murder us?"

"Why, I 'spect they'll chaw us up," answered Mickey indifferently. "But I don't b'lieve we'll agree with 'em. Bet they'll find me tough chawin'."

"Oh Mickey! How can you talk so!" asked Joe, with a shudder.

"They's got to catch us fast, Joe," replied Mickey. "And I bet I'll be wuss nor a weasel to nab. Jist keep up yer sperits, boy. Don't you be climbin' over fences till you come to them."

"But what are we going to do, then? You don't think we can get into that house unbeknowns, do you?"

"We've got to lay low and spot. Don't see my way clear now. But somethin' mought turn up if we only waits. You take that corner, Joe, and I'll take this. We's got to keep our eyes skinned fur snacks. Mebbe the burglars theirselves will turn up. And somethin' else mought happen. Things do keep happenin' you knows if folks only wait."

The thing that happened on this occasion was the turning up of the burglars, and this not until the boys had been on guard duty for several hours.

They did not come in a body however. Their approach to the house was more cunningly performed, and in a way that gave Mickey the idea that this gathering had an important object.

First came the sturdily-built, harsh-faced personage called Mart, so well known to the

newsboy from his several encounters with him. He walked up to the house with the air of a master, opened the door with a latch-key, and stalked boldly in.

About a half-hour afterward Jerry made his appearance from a different direction, his short, thick-set figure, and savage expression betokening both great strength and great brutality.

Lastly came Tim, whose hang-dog countenance and slouching gait were equally familiar to the boys. He was the most suspicious of the three, and his little, sharp eyes roved from right to left, as if he was constantly on the look-out for danger.

But the boys had other business just then, and the cautious villain failed to perceive any cause for suspicion as he made his way to the house, and rung for admission.

Leaving the boys to their devices, we will enter with the burglars, as matters of some interest are transpiring within.

The room in which we find them is the rear apartment on the second floor of the mansion. This room is fitted up as an office, with desk, office chairs, etc. In an open grate by the wall a fire of bituminous coal is burning, though the room is so warm that the windows have to be opened for the admission of fresh air.

On the table around which the three men are seated stands a square, flat walnut box, of about two feet square, and several inches in thickness.

"There's not a shadow of suspicion," remarks Mart. "The police seem utterly at sea. The only odd thing is that about those two boys. Of course they can tell little 'bout us, and they didn't see enough of our faces to be able to describe us. But I wish the police would take them, and squeeze all they can out of them. I am curious to see what kind of a story they will tell."

"I'm cur'us about nothin' but the swag," answered Jerry, harshly. "You've been puttin' us off now long enough. Just make the split and be done with it. That's my say."

"And mine too," remarked Tim.

"All right, lads, a short horse is soon curried." He threw back the lid of the box. Inside it was visible the yellow flash of gold.

"There's not as much as I expected," he continued, as he commenced to count out the money. "Five hundred dollars will cover it. But you can have it between you, according to our bargain. I want the papers for my share."

"That's not the bargain," said Jerry, sharply. "We were to have i thousand apiece if we gave you the papers. I know you, Mait Stewart. Don't try none of your old tricks on me."

"Have I tried any trick? I was never the man to go back on my bargain."

"What are you going to do with the documents?" asked Tim, curiously.

"That is none of your affairs. However I don't mind telling you. You see that fire. Do you suppose that I keep up such a blaze on a warm day for amusement? I will show you what I intend to do."

He emptied the box on the table with a quick movement. Out rolled the gold, and a quantity of folded papers which lay beneath them. Picking up the box he laid it carefully on the blazing coals.

"It don't pay to keep suspicious things about," he declared. "As for the papers—" he seized a handful of them. "We've got to keep the fire going."

He was about to dash them into the blaze, when Jerry caught his arm with a fierce gripe.

"We'll have that thousand first, my sharp cove. D'y'e'spose I'd trust ye arter them deckyments has been burnt? Not much!"

"All right, Jerry! Come this way, and we'll settle that trifle of business."

He rose and led the way to the door.

CHAPTER XI.

MICKEY IN A NEW LINE OF TRADE.

HAD the shrewd villain had the slightest inkling of certain events that were just then taking place outside, they would have cut off their hands rather than leave the room at that minute.

To trace these events we must go back to the youthful spies whom we left on guard duty in the street outside.

It looked like a hopeless thought to get into that house unsuspected, yet Mickey's busy brain was fertile in expedients, and he was not the boy to give up the enterprise without an effort at success. In fact, he had not waited for the advent of all the burglars to put his plan in operation.

"It's just this way, Joe," he explained to his admiring partner. "Ther's fun goin' on inside that there shanty. I'm kinder fond of fun, and I'd like to take a squint at it. I s'pose we mought put the police on the track, but they wouldn't find nothin'.

They never find nothin'. I's got to do it myself, or else guv it up."

"I don't see how," answered Joe, as he looked despairingly at the frowning red front of the house.

"Don't bother yerself 'bout the outside. It's the inside we's got to look arter. Did ye notice that gal as let Jerry in?"

"No."

"I did then, and she looks stupider nor a monkey. She's jist the gal to play a trick on. Jist keep quiet now till I study it up a bit."

At that moment a boy appeared further down the street with a tin pan on top of his head, while the cry of "marble-sand" rung loudly out from his lips.

Mickey gave a sharp glance at the clean white marble steps of the house under surveillance, and another at the itinerant street vendor, and an idea shot like an inspiration into his active brain.

"Stay here, Joe," he ordered. "I'll be back in a jiffy."

He darted off like an arrow down the street, and Joe, who curiously followed him with his eyes, saw him soon in earnest conversation with the marble-sand merchant.

What passed was, of course, out of Joe's hearing, but he saw the pan of sand transferred, after a few minutes, to Mickey's head, and the former salesman go off empty-handed.

Mickey took to his new vocation like a fish to water, and came along the street yelling "marble-sand!" in stentorian tones.

"Bought the seller out, pan and all," he declared to Joe. "Got it cheap, too. Wholesale rates.—Marble-sand! sand! sand! Who wants marble-sand!"

The street rung with his musical yells.

"I don't see what you're after," cried Joe. "What's that got to do with getting into that house?"

"Dunno if ther's anything in it, but it's wuth trying. See yere, Joe, don't you spile nothin' by dumbness. Jist you foller my lead, square through."

He led the way, as he spoke, to the opposite side of the street, and boldly rung the bell of the house in question.

"Come up here," he cried to Joe. "And if I lets out a lie or two, don't you git on yer ear 'bout it. 'Tain't right, I s'pose, but you ain't 'sponsible."

The ring was quickly answered by the girl, who had indeed, as Mickey had declared, an expression of stupid good nature. But an angry look came into her face on seeing who had rung.

"What do you mean by bringing me to the door?" she exclaimed. "I heard you yelling, and I'd have come if I wanted any. Don't you ever ring that bell again."

She was on the point of slamming the door in the boys' faces, but Mickey hastened to get in a word.

"It's yer pretty clean white steps as made me ring," he declared. "I ain't seen the like along the whole street, and I said 'that's the house where there's the gal that I'm arter.' Hope you'll 'excuse me for ringin', but I wanted to see you, that's a fact."

"Hold your tongue, you blarneying young Irishman," said the girl, considerably mollified. "I don't want no sand, so you can save your trouble."

"But I'll sell it as cheap as dirt," persisted Mickey.

"We's a pair of poor orphans, we is. And ther's not a bite to eat in the house. And the baby ain't even got a bit o' gum to chew. And—and when I see'd yer purty face I said: 'There's a charitable lady!' Won't you buy some sand from a poor boy, as I'll sell it dog cheap?"

"What's the use of buying what I don't want?"

"You kin have it all fur a quarter."

"No," she shook her head.

"You kin have it for ten cents, if ye'll guv me and my little brother a crust of bread in the bargain."

The girl looked again. It was certainly dog cheap, as Mickey had declared.

"Here, I knew you'd take it." He pushed into the house without further invitation. "I wants that ten cents to buy bread for mammy and the baby, and ye're goin' to guv Joe and me something to eat. And yer a good lady."

"Stop, stop!" cried the girl. "I don't want your sand. But if you're so hungry I won't mind giving you a piece of bread. You're not lying, are you?"

"Do I look as if I was lying?" asked Mickey indignantly, as he continued to push forward toward the kitchen. "Come, Joe, we's got to show this kind lady that we're hungry."

As neither of the boys had had any dinner they were in good trim to prove the truth of Mickey's assertion. The girl made no further objection, but permitted the boys to make their way to the kitchen. Mickey's compliments had touched her stupid soul.

The kitchen gained his voluble tongue soon worn over, not only to a good meal for him and Joe, but also to the purchase of his stock in trade.

"It's the best sand in the market," he declared. "Tain't only good to clean steps, but you kin polish yer knives and clean yer punty teeth with it. And some folks mixes it with the flour, to make their bread come out white."

The girl opened her eyes. She had not known how useful marble sand might be. Mickey saw that he had made an impression, and he ran on with a dozen other impossible uses.

Joe opened his eyes in surprise and alarm at the unblushing venality of his companion.

"Now, Mickey," he began, in strong depreciation, "you know—"

"Hold yer tongue, Joe," commanded Mickey. "Don't you be tellin' the lady no lies 'bout marble sand. Jist you stick to the truth, like me. If you can't stick to the truth, hold yer tongue!"

Joe was silenced. Mickey had quite taken the wind out of his sails. If the latter had declared

now that cream cheese could be made of marble sand, Joe would have kept quiet. Mickey's impudence had utterly demoralized him.

"I'm going to run right home and buy somethin' to eat for mammy and the baby with this ten cents," declared Mickey. "You stay yere, Joe, and empty the pan, 'cause we ain't givin' that in. Good-by, ma'am. Guess you'll 'scuse me."

Without waiting for a reply he was off like a flash, and the next minute the front door was heard to slam by the tenants of the kitchen. Joe listened in surprise. What had Mickey left the house for?

He was slightly mistaken. Mickey had not left the house, and had not the least intention of doing so. The slam given the door was a mere dodge intended to throw suspicion off the track.

Instead of leaving the house he was now crouched upon the stairs, which he was cautiously ascending in a bent and half-creeping attitude.

Just what was before him was as yet entirely in the dark. He was satisfied that the burglars were in consultation in some of the upper rooms of the house, and to locate them was the first step in his difficult task.

Mickey's hearing was very acute, and he now heard voices which seemed to come from the rear room at the head of the stairs. They seemed, indeed, to be approaching, and he heard the door-handle sharply turn, as if some one was about to leave the room.

Discovery seemed imminent. It was too late to retreat. If the burglars should come down-stairs he would inevitably be caught. But "never despair" is a good motto. The stairs were dark, and Mickey crouched down close to the wall and took the chances.

At the same instant the door opened, and several men stepped out upon the landing.

"This way, Jerry, we'll soon fix that. I fancy you have always found me sharp up to my bar gains."

"I know I'm allers slap up to mine," came to the boy's ears. "Hand over the swag and I'll never ax ye for it twice; that's me."

Mickey's heart had sunk for a moment, as these voices sounded almost in his ears. It leaped again when he found that, instead of descending the stairs, they were moving along the passage to the foot of the next flight.

Not an eye had been cast down to the shadowy spot in which he was crouching. In a moment more the feet of the men sounded on the stairs leading to the third floor.

For the present all was well. But there might be not a minute to lose. He was on his feet with the agility of a cat, and speeding noiselessly upward to the room which the men had just left. There are occasions in which minutes count like hours, and this was one of them.

The door had been left on the crack. Mickey pushed it boldly open, satisfied that the room was empty. He had not failed to observe that three men had left it, and three was the limit which he carried in his mind.

A quick glance of the eye took in all the particulars of the apartment, the desk, the chairs around the table, the heap upon it, the grate fire, and the hard-wood box now freely blazing upon its red coals.

He sprang nimbly in and hastened to the table. The heap upon it took form as he approached. A bundle of closely folded, and severe looking documents, and beside it a loose heap of gold that held the boy's eyes as if by fascination. He had never seen so much money in his life before. He would hardly have believed that so much money existed, so monstrous seemed the heap to his unaccustomed eyes.

Yet in the midst of his fascination, and even while he was bathing his feverish hands in the gold, as one might bathe them in the cool waters of Eden, thought was busy in his brain. His mind was feeling its way through the mystery.

"It's the stolen swag," he told himself. "And lawsee! ain't there lashin's of it? That's the box as old it was in, burnin' on the fire. I wonder if these papers ain't goin' there next? The newspapers said that the dockments was a good deal more valuable nor the cash. Wonder what's in 'em? That's a fat one, anyhow. It oughter be boss of the pile."

He removed his hands, somewhat reluctantly, from the gold, and took up the document which had attracted his attention. It rustled with a crackling sound in his hands. It was parchment, in fact, though Mickey was quite unaware of the existence of any such material. He opened a fold of it, and gazed with wondering eyes upon the closely written lines within.

The boy might well have been pardoned for slightly forgetting himself in the rush of new sensations which had come upon him. He had lingered longer in the room than he was aware of, and was debating in his mind whether he had not best snatch up the whole bundle of documents and beat a hasty retreat, when sudden alarming sounds came to his ears.

The burglars were returning! They were descending the stairs! It was too late to fly!

He looked around him like a cornered cat. There were the windows of the room. Should he risk a leap from that dangerous elevation? There was a closet in the opposite corner. Not a second could be spared in doubt. The closet offered the only place of concealment. He darted for it with a light but hasty step. The parchment document which he had been examining was still in his hands.

The closet proved to be a deep and roomy one, occupying the space under a back stairway, and offering a low corner into which he could crouch.

He was none too soon. Hardly had he disappeared, ere the door opened and the three burglars re-entered the room.

Mart looked around him suspiciously.

"I thought I heard a noise in here," he remarked. "It must have been next door. You can hear so plainly through these walls. Well, what say you now, Jerry? Have I kept my bargain? Are you satisfied to have me burn the papers?"

"This is what I think."

Jerry snatched up two of the documents and hurled them into the fire. He was about doing the same for the others when Mart laid a hasty hand on his arm.

"Not so quick," he said. "Give me time to examine them first."

The fugitive in the closet crouched lower. He might have a long stay.

CHAPTER XII.

A STORY AND A LISTENER.

WHILE Mickey was thus getting himself into a trap up-stairs Joe was getting out of his trap below. It was time, too. The girl had begun to ask some awkward questions about Mickey's new-invented "mammy and the baby." But Joe had been taught the important lesson that it is both wicked and dishonorable to lie, and would sooner have had a tooth pulled out than tell an untruth.

There was nothing for it, then, but to get out of that place as soon as possible, if he didn't want to arouse suspicions. He emptied the pan of sand as Mickey had directed, and hastily took his departure, driving to balance the empty pan on his head.

"It's a good tin pan; and it was bought and paid for. There's no use throwing it away," he soliloquized, as he looked around for Mickey, whom he fully expected to see.

But no Mickey was visible, and the thought began to dawn in Joe's brain that maybe his wide-awake partner had not left the house after all. It might have been all a trick.

But if he hadn't left the house where was he? An intense dread began to arise in Joe's mind. The burglars were all there. Suppose Mickey should fall into their hands? He could hardly think of the possible result without a shudder. That they would stop the daring boy into mince-meat was the least of the horrors that passed through the lad's frightened fancy.

Something must be done. It would never do to save Mickey exposed to such a fate. While thus agitating Joe had been, almost without knowing what he intended, moving through the streets toward the locality of Mrs. Malone's humble residence.

He had a half-idea of confiding the whole story to an old lady, and asking her advice, as he was quite at a loss to know himself how to act. The police might be informed, but Joe was terribly afraid of the police. Was he not himself a fugitive from justice? And would not their first movement be to lock him up in Moyamensing prison?

Thus inwardly debating he approached the street Mrs. Malone honored with her abode. But what was that? A stout policeman lurking at the corner of the street. Joe involuntarily drew back. The very sight of a blue coat and a brass star was too much for his nerves.

Making a detour he approached the street from other extremity. But here, to his horror, stood another policeman, still burlier than the former.

The frightened little fellow fancied that the eyes of this guardian of the law were fixed suspiciously upon his face. He hastened nervously away.

"They're after me. I know they are," he fearfully declared. "They're watching Mother Malone's house and I daresent go there any more. And I daresent go home. And I'm afearred Mickey will be murdered. And whatever am I to do?"

He wrung his hands in dismay. The situation was too difficult a one for his young brain. If he ad only Mickey's ready wit now! But Joe was a very different pattern of a boy. He had not had his wits sharpened by being kicked around the world. Hard times forms a good grindstone for sharpening human wits upon.

In a deep quandary Joe had made his way for several squares, when he was suddenly brought to a halt.

This was caused by a hand catching his coat, and then a pair of young arms being flung around his neck.

"Oh, Joel Joel! If you only knew how glad I am to see you!"

"Mollie!" exclaimed Joe, with a gush of gladness.

"Whatever are you doing away up here?"

"I've been on an errand for mamma. Ain't you coming home, Joe? You don't know what a dreadful way we've been in."

"I'm afearred, Mollie," he replied.

"You needn't be, Joe. Mr. Barton was there, and he was ever so kind. Mamma is sure he won't have you hurt."

"I'd like to go home ever so much. But I daresent. You don't know, Mollie."

"Don't know what? You don't mean to say that you've really been stealing? Oh, Joe, I couldn't never, never, believe that!"

"I wouldn't steal—no, not if I'd starve first!" asserted Joe. "But it looks ever so like it. And I know I can't make them believe anything else."

"I always said you wouldn't. Sit down and tell me all about it. Maybe I can think of something. You know mamma says I'm very quick."

Mollie had quite the air of a young lady of wide experience and tried judgment. Her pretty, earnest young face was ful' of lines of decision as she pulled Joe down beside her on a door-step. Evidently, although she was the younger, she was of a more decided character than her brother.

Joe was rather glad of the occurrence. He was

burning to confide his heavy secret to somebody, and who better than his sympathetic sister? And then she might advise him what to do about Mickey. He had great confidence in her judgment.

He accordingly did so, going over the whole story from the beginning. As may be imagined, there was many a long-drawn breath and many an exclamation from the listener. Mollie became worked up to a high pitch of nervous excitement as Joe told of how they had been caught by the burglars and forced to aid in the robbery. She gripped his hand with both her own, while her hazel eyes seemed distended to double their size as they gazed with awestruck interest into his face.

The story of the pursuit by the watch-dog, of the imprisonment in Mr. Barton's house, and of the final escape, excited no less of a nervous strain in the listener.

"Mercy! Just to think!" she kept exclaiming. "Why, you're a regular hero, Joe. It's a mercy you weren't scared out of your ten senses."

"I was scared enough, Mollie. I tell you that. And I'm worse scared than ever now. I don't know what I ever am to do."

"Why what else is the matter, Joe?"

He proceeded with the story, finishing with the account of that afternoon's adventure, and the fact that he had left Mickey in the house of the burglars.

But Mollie was not nearly as much scared by this as he had expected. In the first place, she had not a very exalted opinion of Mickey as a companion for her brother. In the second place, the story she had just heard gave her great confidence in his ability to take care of himself.

"He will come out all right," she declared. "He's too cunning to get caught."

"But think what kind of men these are, Mollie. They are cunniner than Mickey. And they'd kill him just as quick as our terrier would kill a rat. I wish I could only think of something to do."

"Tell the police, Joe," advised his wise young sister.

"I'm afraid to go near them."

"Then let me tell them."

"No, no, Mollie. Can't you tell me something else to do?"

The children, as we have said, were seated during this conversation upon the step of a house. There was no one behind them to listen to Joe's revelation, and only an occasional passer in front. He had therefore spoken more loudly than he would otherwise have ventured to do, quite oblivious of the fact that the shutters of the window close beside them were partly open, and the sash raised. Had he known that a person was seated beside this window, in full hearing of every word he had said, he might have chosen some safer place for his story.

The person in question had been reading, and paid no attention to the conversation of the children on the doorstep nearly below him, until certain names attracted his notice. He then listened for a moment to Joe's narrative. Soon it became considerably more interesting than his book. The latter was closed and laid aside, while the reader devoted himself to a close interest in Joe's story. And this was more than idle curiosity. His face changed at different parts of the story. Here it lighted up. There it grew shadowed. Finally, as the tracking of the burglars to their den was told, a triumphant expression came upon the listener's face. There was the light of hope and pleasure in his eyes as he listened for a moment more, and then rose and quickly walked to the front door of the house, which he quietly opened.

"What ever shall I do, Mollie?" repeated Joe, in a tone of despair.

"I will tell you," came in another voice from behind them.

Joe sprung up in deep alarm and hastily turned to see who had spoken. His eyes with frightened quickness traced the outlines of the figure who stood on the step. He recognized that slender form and youthful face. He had seen them in Mr. Barton's house on the night of the burglary. It was Milton, Mr. Barton's nephew.

Joe's first impulse was to fly. But the alert youth sprang quickly from the step and caught him by the collar.

"Come, come, my lad, none of that!" he cried. "You are not going to get off so easily again."

"Don't hurt him! It is my brother!" cried Mollie, with mingled appeal and defiance.

"Don't be frightened, little one. I won't harm him. Keep still, Joe, I have just heard your whole story, and I am satisfied you are innocent."

"I had nothing to do with the robbery," whispered Joe. "I came to the house to tell about it, and they wouldn't let me see Mr. Barton."

"I know all that," answered Milton. "That stupid fellow who turned you away has confessed. Mr. Barton knows you are innocent."

"Oh! you don't say so?" cried Joe, with clasped hands and joyful face.

"And he needn't keep away from home any longer?" asked Mollie.

"No; he can go home safely."

"Oh! won't mamma be glad!" The child danced in excited joy.

"But you must come with me now to police headquarters."

"What for?" asked Joe, with new alarm.

"Because I want you to put the officers on the track of the burglars. And Mickey is to be saved, you know. You can lead us to the house where you left him!"

"Yes, yes," cried Joe, joyfully. "Come right away. I'll tell you all about it! I'm so afraid they might kill poor Mickey."

the three set off at a quick pace. Mollie was

bound not to lose sight of Joe again until she had safely landed him home.

While these events were taking place, Mr. Barton had been closeted with one of the most expert officers in the detective service. As days went by without any clew to the robbers he had grown more and more anxious.

That Martin Stewart was at the bottom of the robbery he had now no doubt. The telegram received from him was undoubtedly a fraud. Mr. Barton had telegraphed to England for information, and learned that Stewart had not been at his ordinary home for over a month.

"He must be in this city," he declared. "Who else would want my papers, or know just where to look for that box?"

"It seems to me that you were rather confiding, to trust such an important box in such an unsafe place," answered the detective, severely.

"It was only there temporarily," replied Mr. Barton. "I had made it up with my papers and some loose funds which I happened to have on hand, to deposit in the Safe Deposit building. I do so every spring before going to the country. Stewart must have known this."

The detective mused a moment over this information.

"I wish we could find those boys," remarked Mr. Barton.

"We are on the look-out for them. But I doubt if they will be of much use to us when found."

"I am sure they will then," declared Mr. Barton. "I am sure they know a great deal."

Their conversation was interrupted by the sudden and excited entrance of three persons, one of whom Mr. Barton recognized as his nephew Milton. The others were a boy and a girl. They all presented flushed faces and dilated eyes, and seemed boiling over with excitement.

"What in the world is the matter?" exclaimed the detective, a little angrily. "You have come in as if you had been shot out of a cannon."

"I have the most glorious news," exclaimed Milton, in a tone of deep enthusiasm. "This is little Joe Joram, whom we have been looking for. He has told me the whole story. He knows where the burglars are, and can lead us right to the house. And Mickey, the other boy, is there, trying to get the stolen box away."

Mr. Barton was on his feet, as much excited as the speaker. The officer kept his coolness.

"Come, come, sit down," he said. "Tell us the whole story, and then we will know better what to do."

"And while we're telling it they might catch Mickey and kill him," declared Joe. "Oh, Mr. Barton, make them come right away! It would be dreadful if they'd kill poor Mickey! I'll tell you all about it afterward."

"The boy is right," rejoined Mr. Barton, decidedly. "We had best strike while the iron is hot."

"Very well," answered the officer, coolly. "We can test the lad's story, at any rate. Wait. I will get a force together for the expedition immediately."

CHAPTER XIII.

MICKEY GOES FOR THE PLUNDER.

"Count that gold, Jerry," said Mart, waving his hand rather contemptuously toward the heap of yellow metal on the table. "I have something here that I am more interested in."

He seated himself leisurely in an arm-chair, drew toward him the heap of folded papers, and began to quietly unfold and examine them.

Jerry lost no time in obeying orders. He was, as we might say, not much of a scholar, and the counting proceeded but slowly under his unaccustomed fingers, while Tim stood by looking on with the gloating eyes of a miser.

"Not much in that, any way," and the paper Mart had been examining went dashing into the fire, where now the remnants of the box were sinking into a heap of white ashes.

"Five hundred and fifty," announced Jerry, after some time spent in the task of counting.

"Very well. Split it between you. That's the bargain. You have the balance in your pocket."

"Yes, on a bit of paper, that may not be worth the price of the ink on it," was the contemptuous reply. "You're a big gun now, Mart Stewart, but, I can remember when you were no bigger nor us; and in them days you played some queer tricks. Maybe your check's sound, but I'd sooner finger the cash."

"You can easily get the cash for it. You have only to present it at bank."

"All right. Here's for you, Tim. I'll freeze onto the yaller boys for mine."

"Not much," answered Tim, sternly rejecting the proffered check.

"Take it to the bank now, and find out for yourselves if it is a fraud," remarked Mart.

"You take it, Tim," answered Jerry. "I'll stay here. Don't you burn no more of them papers, Mart, till we know if the money is sound."

"Why, you tried to burn them yourself a few minutes ago."

"That's when I was a bit of a consarned fool. I've come round to my senses since. Peg out, Tim. I'll watch the swag here till you come back."

Tim lost no time in obeying orders. While he was gone Mart settled himself comfortably in his arm-chair, and went on with the perusal of his prize documents. Jerry, for his part, stationed himself with his elbows on the table, his chin in his palms, and his small eyes fixed alternately with affection on the gold, and with suspicion on his companion. He plainly had but little faith in Mart Stewart.

The latter went slowly over the papers, laying them one by one aside when examined. His brows contracted as he unfolded the last.

"By Heaven, the most important of the whole lot is missing. Yet I know it was in the box. Where is it?"

His eyes turned inquiringly toward Jerry.

"Maybe it was one of them I flung in the fire," answered Jerry.

"That's so. I forgot them. It is all right if it is only turned to ashes."

They were interrupted by the return of Tim.

"Nary swag," announced the latter. "The check's no big, and they don't like the cut of my phiz, so they won't pan out. Here's yer paper. Hand us over the solid stuff."

"They wouldn't pay it?"

"That's about the shape of what I'm a-saying."

"Come with me. I'll see that it is paid. You can stay here, Jerry, and keep an eye on the proceeds. We'll be back in half an hour."

"Ay, ay!" growled Jerry. "Peg out."

The next minute he remained alone in the room, guardian over the precious heap upon the table, on which his eyes were riveted with the avidity of a miser.

While this conversation was taking place it may be imagined that the position of the youthful spy in the closet was anything but comfortable. He was doubled up in a painful attitude, yet he was afraid to move a limb for fear of making a noise. And the worst of it all was that his shrewd trick seemed likely to prove unprofitable. The papers were being burnt. The money was being divided. He began to feel that he might as well be in the street selling newspapers, as in ambush on the robbers.

"I allers was a blamed little fool," he said to himself. "There was them dokuments right under my own fingers. I only had to snatch 'em and skedaddle. But I must go moonin' over 'em like a thunderin' jackass till I got cotched. And sarves me right fur a snub-nosed numskull."

He had hoped that the robbers might soon get through with their conference and depart. But when Mart and Tim set out for the bank, leaving Jerry for a half-hour's wait, the impatient spy was in despair.

"I'm as stiff as if I'd been swallerin' ten-penny nails," he declared. "And what's I got fur it all? Only this." He took the document which he had secured from the heap and hid it under a pile of books on the floor of the closet. "Mought as well make sure of it. If they catch me they won't catch the dokument."

Everything in the room was now so quiet that Mickey began to surmise that Jerry might have gone to sleep over his charge. If so there would be a chance to escape.

It did not take him long to work upon this idea. He carefully straightened himself out, and crept noiselessly toward the closet door. It stood open a crack, and by pushing it slightly further open he was able to see out.

If Jerry had just then looked in that direction he would have seen first a shaggy head of red hair, and then a pair of small but sparkling eyes emerge from the opening of the closet door. But Jerry had only eyes for the heap of gold. His arms were crossed upon the table, his head resting upon them, and his eyes fixed on the glittering mass.

He had, indeed, every appearance of being asleep. Mickey, in his hasty fashion, took it at once for granted that he was, and a wild hope rose in the boy's mind that he might not only escape, but might take with him the valuable documents, which lay on the opposite end of the table to the gold.

The closet door was a little out of Jerry's line of vision, and he failed to perceive a youthful figure slowly emerge from that refuge, and noiselessly creep across the carpet toward the opposite side of the room.

Fortunately the floor was sound, and no creaking boards announced Mickey's progress. He was now directly behind the robber, and might safely have counted on gaining the outer door during Jerry's abstraction.

But to retreat empty-handed and all those valuable papers asking for an owner? Mickey could not bear the thought. It was worth while to risk something for the sake of gaining some valuable result to his enterprise.

Jerry's breathing was slow and steady. He was certainly asleep. Without a moment's hesitation Mickey left the wall and dragged himself across the floor toward the table.

His progress was noiseless. Not a board creaked nor a joint cracked. In a minute he was behind Jerry's chair. In another minute he had gained the end of the table, which concealed him from view by the heedless guard.

Then there came an interval of breathless rest. All the boy's senses were alert. He was listening for any tokens of alarm. Yet Jerry had not moved. His breath still came at steady intervals. There was nothing to show that he had heard a sound.

The table was a long and wide one, and was covered with a green cloth that hung on every side half-way to the floor. Mickey retreated backward until half under the table. He then reached upward, advanced his fingers slowly over the edge, and slyly closed them upon one of the coveted documents.

It came out of the pile without a rustle. He drew it over the table edge and down to his lurking-place. A sense of triumph came into the boy's mind as he made a second effort. But his first task had been the easiest. The remaining papers lay farther away. He had to grope before one of them came within reach of his fingers. And in seeking to lay hold of it he gave it a slight push.

The result was decidedly unexpected. The papers had been carelessly heaped. This push caused them to settle down, while one that lay at the edge of the table toppled over, and fell with a slight crash to the floor.

The boy's fingers were hastily withdrawn. He drew back under the table like a turtle into its shell, and breathlessly awaited results.

They were not long in coming. Jerry had been very far from sleeping, though he had been lost in a sort of day-dream, building palaces with the money before him. But in a moment now he was on his feet, and looking sharply to right and left.

"What the deuce was that?" he ejaculated.

Mickey trembled in his covert under the table. He was none too well hidden. The thought rushed through his brain that he had been just smart enough to get himself into trouble.

He was inwardly debating if he should leap up and make a break for the door, when Jerry's next remark somewhat quieted his apprehensions.

"It's only them papers. I s'pose I must have pushed them, for here's one on the floor." He stooped and picked it up, without discovering the lurking boy. "Ain't it 'bout time them coves was back? I want to git out of these diggin's."

His query was answered by the sound of opening and closing of the house door, and of steps and voices on the stairs. In a minute after Mart and Tim entered the room.

"What's the luck?" asked Jerry, eagerly. "Did they pony down?"

"Square on the nail," answered Tim. "I got the dough salted. Let's make a split and git out of this."

They advanced to the table without perceiving the crouching figure beneath it, which was but partly hidden by the cloth.

The division of the money proceeded, occupying several minutes. Then Tim and Jerry, with great satisfaction, disposed of their shares about their persons.

"Don't keer a fig now how soon you make ashes of the papers," remarked the latter. "It's all square, Mart, and you're sound on the goose."

"You might have known that from old times," declared Mart, as he seated himself at the table, and began to gather up the scattered documents.

"What are you sticking your leg under the table for?" he asked Jerry, as his foot encountered something soft.

"Tain't me," answered Jerry. "Must be Tim."

"Nary Tim," rejoined the latter, advancing his pedal extremity. "Guess it's the cat."

Mart gave a quick shove with his foot, and out rolled neither a man's leg nor a cat, but a very ragged and highly demoralized boy.

If ever three men were dumfounded the three burglars were at that moment. They stood looking in stupefied amazement on the boy beneath them. Who he was, and where he had come from, it was impossible to imagine; and it became a question in their minds whether he had tumbled from the ceiling or risen through the floor.

Mickey lay crouched upon the floor, looking up at them with his sharp eyes, and thinking with lightning speed how he should get out of the awkward scrape into which he had fallen.

There was only one hopeful course, and he was not long in taking it. Ere the men could get over their first amazement, they saw the discovered spy leap like an india-rubber ball to his feet, and make a dash for the door.

It was a shrewd movement, but it did not prove successful. For Jerry's long arm reached out and grasped him by the collar as he passed. Mickey found himself brought up all of a sudden.

"Not so fast, my nice little cove," cried Jerry, as he held out his prize at arm's length. "Stand level and let's have a glint at ye. Who the deuce are you, anyhow, where did you come from, and what are you arter?"

"Hang me for a monkey if it ain't the sharp young rat as we nabbed at the wall that night!" exclaimed Tim. "What in the blazes is he after here?"

Mart advanced and caught the boy by the ear, which he gave an angry pinch.

"Speak out, you ragamuffin, or it will be worse for you. We are not the kind of men to play the spy on. How did you get under that table, and what brings you here? If you lie to me I'll pull your ears out by the roots."

Mickey had trembled at first on finding himself in such desperate hands. But he had now screwed up his courage again. He felt instinctively that this was no time for lying, and that he had best own up the truth.

"I pigeoned it on that gal down-stairs," he acknowledged. "And I slicked under the table while this coon was asleep."

"Asleep? Hey, Jerry?"

"It's a lie," growled Jerry.

"Mought as well been, anyhow, fur I played it on ye."

"And what brought you here?"

"Cause you guy me a lesson in burglary, and I wanted to finish my eddication," continued the undaunted boy. "The papers is layin' it onto me and Joe Joram for stealing that box of gold, and I thought if I could steal it back ag'in, that'd make it square."

"Burn my eyes, if he ain't a sharp little coon!" exclaimed Jerry, with admiration. "Hang if I wouldn't like to have that boy for a prentice. There's the makin' of a first class cracksman in him."

"It is the papers he is after," cried Mart, as he picked up the one which Mickey had abstracted from the table. "See here, Jerry. You're a nice one to leave on guard. Search the little rascal ad-

see if there's more of them on him. As for these, I'll soon make an end of them."

The boy's eyes dilated as he saw the villain grasp the bundle of papers and fling them on the red coals of the fire, where they instantly broke into a strong blaze. He began to fear that his daring enterprise was useless. That scorching flame was rapidly converting to ashes all evidence of the robbery.

"There's nothing about him," announced Jerry, after a quick investigation of Mickey's loose-fitting garb.

The boy chuckled quietly to himself. He remembered that one document at least remained, safely concealed in the closet. It was lucky that he had not bidden it in his clothes, as he had at first intended.

"What will we do with the young hound?" queried Mart, after stirring up the ashes of the burnt papers with the poker.

"Knock him in the head and fling him in the coal-hole," suggested Tim.

"Give him to me for a 'prentice," said Jerry. "I'll make a good cracksman of him."

"Hand him over to me," remarked a third voice.

"I'll make an honest man of him."

Had a thunderbolt fallen in their midst they could not have sprung around more quickly. There, by the door, stood a square-built, stern-faced man, who was surveying them with a look of cynical enjoyment of the situation.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TABLES TURNED.

"Who in Satan's name are you, and what brings you here?" cried Mart, as he sprung forward with a scowl toward the intruder.

"Solid wood, my friend," and the stranger advanced further into the room. "Drop that boy, you ruffian, or—"

"Or what?" asked Jerry savagely.

"Or I'll drop you." A pistol gleamed in his hand. Jerry took the hint and quickly loosed his hold of Mickey's collar.

"What brings you here, I say?" Mart again fiercely demanded.

"You will know soon enough. Come in, Mr. Barton."

In response to this request Mr. Barton entered the room, followed closely by the diminutive form of Joe Joram. The latter looked eagerly around for Mickey, and rushed forward on perceiving him.

"All right, Mickey?" he eagerly asked.

"All square, Joe," was the answer.

"I've brung the cops," whispered Joe. "Jist you stand by and there will be fun."

Meanwhile Mr. Barton had fixed his eyes severely upon Mart's form, who shrunk involuntarily on seeing who confronted him.

"Martin Stewart!" exclaimed the gentleman in a severe tone. "So my suspicions are correct! It was really you who committed this burglary!"

"What the deuce are you talking about, John Barton?" exclaimed Mart in a blustering tone.

"How dare you accuse me of burglary? Have I not as much right in this country as you have? Do not make such a charge on me again, or by the Lord—"

"Drop all that now," broke in Mr. Barton's companion. "We've got the dead wood on you sure, and bluster will do no good. How is it, boys? Are not these the three men who broke into Mr. Barton's house?"

"Jist as sure as shootin'." answered Mickey sententiously. "I'd know them if I saw them dug out of a pile of lumber."

"And they made us help them in it," said Joe. "They put me through a window, and made me open the door for them."

"Shoot me if I stand any more of this!" exclaimed Mart. "This is my house, and the law will aid me in defending it. Come, lads, back me, and we'll hustle these fellows out."

He advanced with a threatening aspect, followed by Jerry and Tim, without regard to the pistol held by the stranger. The latter, however, showed no intention of using it. On the contrary, he merely gave a shrill whistle, that rung throughout the house.

The villains paused at this unexpected signal. The next instant, in answer to it, quick steps were heard on the stairs, and three or four stout policemen marched into the room.

"You might as well give up, my men," remarked the stranger, coolly. "We have come for you, and have no intention of going away without you."

Mart looked at his two companions. For the moment it seemed as if a rush was intended, and as if a fight for freedom was imminent.

But the policemen had drawn their clubs and stood grouped around the door, and even Jerry acknowledged, by his expression, that he felt the odds too great. Mart quickly assumed another line of action.

"I am obliged to you, John Barton," he sarcastically remarked, "for this visit, although it is a little abrupt. As for the burglary at your house, I know nothing of it. If you can find the stolen good here you are welcome."

Mr. Barton looked at the detective.

"Shall a search be made?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the latter.

"Mought as we save yer powder," exclaimed Mickey. "Everything's gone up in smoke. Didn't I see the hull job?" He pointed to the grate fire.

"You don't mean to say that he has burned the papers?" cried Mr. Barton.

"That's 'bout what's th' matter," answered Mickey. "Them's their ashes."

"During this colloquy Mart stood with a smile of insulting triumph upon his face.

"A very pretty game of yours, John Barton," he remarked. "You are holding a property to which you have no claim. I came over here to establish my legal rights, and you trump up a pretty story of stolen papers, and hire these boys to lie for you. Go ahead. Show your hand if you will. But when you are done I intend to show mine. I will challenge you to produce the document which cuts me out of that property. And if you fail to produce it, by all that's good you shall hand over the estate. We shall see who holds the winning cards."

"You have burned the paper!"

"Have I? Suppose you prove it?" Mr. Barton stood confused and irresolute, clasping his hands in dismay. He felt his estate slipping from under his feet.

The detective turned to the officers.

"Arrest those men," he briefly ordered.

"Do not resist," Mart advised his companions. "They cannot prove this ridiculous charge. Let them go on to the end of their rope. It will be my turn then. They shall pay well for this outrage."

The officers, heedless of this bluster, laid their hands on the shoulders of the prisoners, who yielded quietly.

"Take them away," commanded the detective.

"Very well," said Mart, scornfully. "But you had best hunt up that missing document, cousin John. I expect to call on you before long for a settlement."

"You have burned it, villain!" exclaimed Mr. Barton, in angry dismay. "I can prove you have burned it."

A mocking laugh was the only answer.

"Hold hard there!" cried Mickey, with a sudden thought. "Maybe we'll git a ring in Mr. Mart's nose yet. I've got a notion all their papers wasn't burnt."

He darted to the closet, while all eyes were fixed in wonder on his movements. In a moment he emerged, flourishing a folded parchment in his hand.

"Look at that, Mr. Barton!" he exclaimed. "I slicked that out of the pile unbeknownst to them."

With trembling hands and flushed face Mr. Barton seized the parchment, which he could scarcely open for nervous eagerness. A single look was enough. A gleam of joy and triumph shot across his face.

"By heaven, boy!" he cried, "you are a jewel! It is the paper I want! I don't care a fig for the balance. So, Martin Stewart, you are checkmated at last!"

"Maybe not!" came in a furious reply.

A quick spring tore the villain loose from the officer who held him. In an instant he had crossed the floor and made a fierce grasp for the important document. His effort would probably have been successful had not Mickey, who stood beside the gentleman, seized the paper which he loosely held and sprung behind him with it.

The next moment the detective and the policeman leaped together upon the baffled villain and drew him back. A pair of handcuffs, deftly slipped on his wrists, took from him the power of further mischief. His game was played, and he had lost.

"Take them away!" commanded Mr. Barton. "It is our turn now."

The scowling villains were removed from the room muttering low threats of future vengeance.

"I have you, boys, to thank for the safety of my estate," continued Mr. Barton, turning gratefully to the lads who stood behind him. "Do not think that I will soon forget it. You shall be well paid for your courage and honesty."

"Dunno as I want no pay," asserted Mickey. "It's pay enough to git the best of them smart coons."

"And I don't want to be paid, either," broke in Joe. "I hope I will always be honest without pay."

And here it is best to let the curtain fall on our drama of real life. We have attempted to give but one chapter in the life of a wide-awake newsboy, and that chapter has reached its end. As on the stage the curtain drops upon a tableau at the end of the play, so we let it fall upon the scene of the detection of crime and the reward of honesty.

But as on the stage the curtain is often raised for a moment again, to give the audience a last glimpse of the stage, so we shall lift it for a moment for a final glance.

Years have passed since the date of the scene just given. The criminals have been condemned to a long term of imprisonment, have served out their sentences, and have vanished into that great world, which swallows up man as the ocean swallows up rivers.

As for our two boys, they are now two men, but partners still. Educated by the aid of Mr. Barton, and set up in business together, they have prospered with them, and no one would recognize timid little Joe, in the self-possessed Mr. Joram, or rollicking Mickey in the business-like Mr. Malone, who now compose the thriving firm of Malone and Joram.

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